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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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India worried about violence on minorities in B'desh

MEA condemns targeting of Hindus, Christians, Buddhists

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

India on Friday said the "unremitting hostilities" against minorities in Bangladesh is a matter of grave concern.

New Delhi also reacted cautiously to the homecoming of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) acting chairman Tarique Rahman saying it should be seen in the context of ensuring inclusive polls.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India condemns the recent killing of Hindu youth, Dipu Chandra Das, in Bangladesh's Mymensingh. Bangladeshi authorities have already arrested 12 people.

"The unremitting hostilities against the minorities in Bangladesh including Hindus, Christians and Buddhists is a matter of grave concern. We condemn the recent killing of a Hindu youth in Bangladesh and expect that the perpetrators of the crime will be brought to justice," he said at his weekly media briefing.

Over 2,900 incidents of violence against minorities have been documented in Bangladesh by independent sources during the tenure of interim government, he noted.

"The incidents of violence against minorities in Bangladesh cannot be brushed aside as media exaggeration or dismissed as political violence," Jaiswal said.

Members of Sant Samaj protest over the alleged killing of Hindus in Bangladesh, in Varanasi, Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

> **We condemn the recent gruesome killing of a Hindu youth in Bangladesh and expect that the perpetrators of the crime would be brought to justice**
>
> —Randhir Jaiswal, MEA spokesperson

Bangladesh has witnessed a fresh wave of unrest and political instability following the killing of youth leader Sharif Osman Hadi, who was a prominent face in last year's mass protests that forced the collapse of the Sheikh Hasina government. His killing has also triggered some fresh strain in India-Bangladesh ties as certain elements sought to link New Delhi to his death.

"We have rejected the false narrative that has been projected in Bangladesh. The law and order situation there is the responsibility of the government of Bangladesh," Jaiswal said.

On the killing of another Hindu man, Amrit Mondal alias Samrat, by a mob in Rajbari Town on Wednesday night, Jaiswal appeared to link it to deteriorating security situation and hostilities towards minorities in Bangladesh. *—PTI*

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Govt: GST cut for air filters will open Pandora's box

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

The Centre on Friday cautioned the Delhi High Court that ordering a GST cut on air purifiers could open a "Pandora's Box", as the GST Council is a constitutional, federal body whose decisions must follow a laid-down process. Hearing a PIL seeking to classify air purifiers as medical devices and reduce GST from 18% to 5%, the bench questioned why the levy could not be lowered amid Delhi's pollution crisis, noting purifiers cost Rs 10,000–60,000 and are beyond common reach.

The government sought time to file a detailed reply, saying the issue is under examination at the highest level and warning against bypassing the Council mechanism. The court granted 10 days for a counter-affidavit. *—Agencies*

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Air pollution worst health crisis since Covid: Docs

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

Doctors warn that India faces its most severe public health emergency since Covid-19 as toxic air pollution fuels a "hidden tsunami" of undiagnosed airway and cardiovascular diseases.

Pulmonologist Manish Gautam highlighted that for millions in North India, irreversible damage is already done, urging the government to establish a "lung health task group" for early detection. Although the government recently stated in Parliament that conclusive data linking AQI directly to mortality is unavailable, experts cite the 2025 Lancet Countdown report, which attributes 1.72 million annual deaths in India to PM 2.5 exposure. Doctors stress that visible smog is only the "tip of the iceberg." *—PTI*

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Myanmar to hold third phase of elections on 25 Jan

MYANMAR, 26 DEC

Myanmar's military junta has announced that a third phase of voting for the general election will take place on 25 January, as stated by state media on Friday. This phase follows the two earlier voting periods scheduled for 28 December and 11 January, covering a combined total of 202 townships out of the nation's 330. The third phase will focus on 63 townships, as outlined in an announcement from the ruling junta via the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar. However, the dates for vote counting and the subsequent announcement of results remain undisclosed and likely to be announced soon. Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing has previously acknowledged that the elections will not occur nationwide, due to ongoing armed resistance against the military regime, which has intensified since the 2021 coup. *—Agencies*

>>>More on Page 5

Siliguri hoteliers ban Bangladeshi tourists

KOLKATA, 26 DEC

The Greater Siliguri Hoteliers Welfare Association has decided to temporarily halt accommodation for Bangladeshi tourists amid political tensions in the neighbouring country.

The move follows incidents reportedly straining India-Bangladesh relations, including alleged disrespect towards the Indian flag and provocative statements by certain Bangladeshi citizens.

The restriction applies to all 180 member hotels in and around Siliguri, with nearly 50 non-member hotels voluntarily following suit. The association said the ban will be reviewed periodically, with accommodations potentially reinstated once conditions are deemed safe and respectful.

Siliguri, located near the international border and the strategic Siliguri corridor connecting mainland India with northeastern states, is a key entry point for Bangladeshi tourists. *—PTI*

EYE ON 2026 POLLS

Kerala elects its 1st BJP Mayor

Newly elected Mayor of Thiruvananthapuram VV Rajesh and Deputy Mayor Asha Nath during the swearing-in ceremony **PHOTO: PTI**

T'PURAM, 26 DEC

BJP leader VV Rajesh was elected mayor of Thiruvananthapuram Corporation on Friday after the saffron party won 50 of the 101 wards, marking its first-ever victory in a municipal corporation in Kerala.

In the mayoral election on Friday, Rajesh secured 51 votes, including the support of an Independent councillor.

RP Sivaji of the LDF received 29 votes, while UDF candidate KS Sabarinathan secured 19 votes, of which two were later declared invalid.

Senior BJP leaders, including state president Rajeev Chandrasekhar, were present at the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation office to witness Rajesh being elected mayor of the state capital.

Union Minister Suresh Gopi and former BJP state president K Surendran were also present.

Rajesh later took the oath as the mayor of the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation.

The BJP wrested control of the Corporation from the LDF after nearly four decades of LDF rule.

He said he would see the 101 wards of the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation as a single unit and move forward together by holding everyone together.

"Our target is to make Thiruvananthapuram one of the top three cities in the country in terms of development," he said. *—PTI*

>>>Continued on Page 3

Hindu groups vandalise X-mas decorations in Raipur, MP, Assam

GUWAHATI/RAIPUR, 26 DEC

Police across three states reported vandalism of Christmas decorations this week, with arrests in Assam and cases booked in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.

In Assam's Nalbari district, four members of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal were arrested for allegedly vandalising Christmas decorations at St Mary's School in Panigaon village and burning festive items at shops.

Police said the accused entered the school premises unlawfully, damaged lights, plant pots and other decorations, raised slogans and warned authorities against Christmas celebrations. A case was registered at Belsor police station and further investigation is underway.

Miscreants purportedly vandalising Christmas decoration at Magneto Mall in Raipur, Chhattisgarh. **PHOTO: X/@PRAKASHRAAJ**

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma praised the prompt police action, saying the government was committed to maintaining peace, communal harmony and the safety of institutions and citizens.

In Chhattisgarh, police booked 30-40 unidentified persons for vandalising Christmas decorations at Raipur's Magneto Mall during a day-long bandh called by Hindu organisations. CCTV footage showed a mob entering the closed mall with sticks, damaging property and a Christmas tree. Some suspects have been identified.

In Indore, police are examining a viral video of Christmas decorations being removed there. *—Agencies*

HORRORS CONTINUE

CEO, 2 others gangrape woman in Udaipur

JAIPUR, 26 DEC

Three people, including the CEO of a private IT company, were arrested in Udaipur for the alleged gangrape of a female company manager after a birthday party, police said on Friday.

Police said the accused CEO, Jitesh Sisodia, had organised the party last Saturday, which the manager attended.

The other accused are the firm's executive head and her husband, Gaurav Sirohi, a resident of Meerut.

All three were arrested on Thursday and produced before a court, which remanded them to four days' police custody. "The accused were arrested after a case was registered at Sukher police station under relevant Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita provisions," Udaipur Superintendent of Police Yogesh Goyal said.

According to the woman's complaint, she was left alone after other guests departed. The executive head offered to drop her home and took her in a car with Sisodia and Sirohi. On the way, she was allegedly offered a cigarette-like substance and lost consciousness.

She later realised she had been sexually assaulted. Police said her medical examination was conducted, statements recorded, and the investigation handed over to Additional SP Madhuri Verma. *—PTI*

Delhi girl, drugged, gangraped

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

Two men, including a private bank employee, have been arrested for the alleged gang rape of a 13-year-old girl in outer Delhi's Samaypur Badli area, police said on Thursday.

The accused Narottam alias Neta, 28, a barber known to the victim's family, and Rishabh Jha, 26, a bank employee allegedly took the girl to Narottam's house on Saturday, forced her to drink alcohol and raped her.

The crime came to light after the girl's family alerted police.

Based on her statement and medical report, the men were booked under Section 70 of the BNS and Section 6 of the POCSO Act, and arrested on Sunday. *—Agencies*

US bombs IS in Nigeria, says 'Mery Christmas'

WASHINGTON, 26 DEC

The US on Thursday launched a "deadly" strike against the terror organisation Islamic State in northwest Nigeria, said President Donald Trump. Trump, in post on Truth Social, said that the strike targeted terrorists over the alleged killings of Christians. The death toll was not immediately available.

Nigeria said the strikes were made on a bilateral treaty.

"The US launched a powerful and deadly strike against ISIS terrorist scum," Trump wrote. "May God bless our military, and Merry Christmas to all, including the dead terrorists, of which there will be many more if their slaughter of Christians continues.". *—ANI*

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Indian student shot dead in Toronto

TORONTO, 26 DEC

A 20-year-old Indian doctoral student was shot dead near the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC) campus in Canada, with police treating the case as a homicide, officials said.

The shooting occurred on Tuesday afternoon near Highland Creek Trail and Old Kingston Road. Toronto police said they were called to the area around 3.30pm after a member of the public found an injured man lying on a paved trail in a wooded area and called emergency services. The victim, identified on Wednesday as Shivank Avasthi, had suffered a gunshot wound and was pronounced dead at the scene.

Police said the suspect fled before officers arrived and no description has yet been released.

India's Consulate in Toronto expressed "deep anguish" over the death. *—PTI*

AFTER BACKLASH

KIA extends free T1 arrival parking to 15 minutes

BENGALURU, 26 DEC

Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) has officially extended the free parking duration at Terminal 1 Arrival to 15 minutes, effective 26 December. This policy applies to all private vehicles and taxi services at the terminal's designated pick-up areas. The update marks a change from the previous 10 minute limit, which was announced earlier this month.

The decision by Bangalore International Airport Limited (BIAL), the operator of KIA, follows a review of passenger and stakeholder feedback amid the December festive rush. The extension is intended to provide greater ease and flexibility for travellers and their families, while supporting seamless kerbside pick-up experience. This move specifically addresses the recent backlash regarding the previous 10-minute limit.

- The BIAL recently imposed fines for cars staying near Terminal 1 for more than 10 minutes, but found that the time limit was too short

Previous regulations, introduced on 13 December, required all commercial vehicles to wait in the designated P3 and P4 parking areas with a 10 minute complimentary window. Under the revised policy, this free duration has been extended to 15 minutes. For stays exceeding this limit, cab operators will be charged Rs 100 for the first 30 minutes and Rs 50 for each additional hour.

To further mitigate the distance to the parking zones, passengers can opt to use shuttles which run every 7 minutes, six cars, and 10 buggies operating to and from the P3/P4 pick-up areas, BIAL stated in an official release. *—PTI*

4 die in accident in Chikkaballapur

CHIKKABALLAPUR, 26 DEC

Four youths were killed on the spot when their motorbike collided with a tipper near Ajjavara village on Thursday night. The accident occurred around 9.30pm, police said.

The deceased have been identified as Nandish, Narasimha, Arun, and Manoj, all in their late 20s and residents of Ajjavara village. Narasimha and Nandish were brothers, while Arun and Manoj were their friends, police added.

Sources said the group was returning from a church in Chikkaballapura after offering prayers when the tipper, traveling from Sidlagatta towards Chikkaballapura, rammed into their motorbike. The impact was severe, killing all four instantly.

Police reached the spot and initiated an investigation.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced Rs 5 lakh ex-gratia to the kin of the deceased.

Preliminary investigations suggested that the driver of the tipper truck was at fault. *—Salar News*

Two killed after car crashes into a tree near City

BENGALURU, 26 DEC

Two people of a family died while four others were injured after their car crashed into a tree on the outskirts of the City, police said on Friday. The deceased were identified as Harish Sastry, 39 and his father Veerabhadra, 80, they said. According to police, the accident occurred at around 6pm on 25 December at Thotagere Cross in Nelamangala taluk of Bengaluru Rural district when the family was returning home after visiting their village. Preliminary investigation revealed that the driver lost control of the vehicle and hit the tree. The injured were admitted to a private hospital in Nelamangala, where they are undergoing treatment, a senior police officer said. A case was registered and further investigation is underway. *—PTI*

All GBA parks to be closed on New Year's Eve

BENGALURU, 26 DEC

The Greater Bengaluru Authority said in a notification that all parks and lakes under the jurisdiction of the Bengaluru Central City Corporation will be closed from 6.00pm on New Year's Eve. "As a large number of people are likely to gather on the last day of the year, there is a possibility of untoward incidents and disturbance to public peace," GBA said in a statement. "Therefore, in the interest of public safety and as a precautionary measure, it has been directed that all parks and lakes under the jurisdiction of the Bengaluru's Central City Corporation will be temporarily closed to the public after 6:00pm. Necessary signage will be installed, and required measures will be taken in coordination with the Police Department." *—Salar News*

PHOTO: ANI

Priyank flayed for sharing AI video of BJP in Unnao case

BENGALURU, 26 DEC

IT/BT Minister Priyank Kharge was criticised after sharing an AI image of BJP members garlanding Kuldeep Singh Sengar, who was recently released on bail in the Unnao rape case. Kharge, who later deleted the post, shared the image tagging Prime Minister Narendra Modi and saying his slogan "beti bachao, beti padhao got a whole new meaning". However, the image was found to be AI-generated, as Sengar, a former BJP leader, is still lodged in jail for the custodial killing of the victim's father, despite being granted bail in the rape case. Netizens questioned whether the recently passed hate speech law in Karnataka would apply to Kharge or if it was meant to target the Opposition. *—Salar News*

New Aadhaar Seva Kendra opened in Mangaluru

MANGALURU, 26 DEC

The Unique Identification Authority of India launched a new Aadhaar Seva Kendra here, enhancing citizen-centric Aadhaar services in the city. The centre was inaugurated by a local Aadhaar holder on Friday, reflecting UIDAI's citizen-centric approach and commitment to inclusive service delivery, an official statement said. "The Mangaluru Aadhaar Seva Kendra is a Model-C centre with four operational kits. It was also stated that 22 Aadhaar Seva Kendras will be opened in Karnataka and 473 Aadhaar Seva Kendras across the nation by September 2026, reinforcing UIDAI's commitment to accessible, efficient, and citizen-centric Aadhaar services in line with the Government of India's vision of digital inclusion and good governance," it added. *—PTI*

After Ch'durga crash, State to check buses for safety

Driver succumbs to injuries, taking toll to seven

DAVANGERE, 26 DEC

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday said an investigation would be conducted into the safety mechanisms of all buses operating in the State.

His statement comes in the wake of a bus accident in Chitradurga district that left seven dead.

He opined that the truck driver was at fault as he had jumped the median of the road.

"There must be a safety mechanism in all the buses and trucks. We will get it investigated," Siddaramaiah told reporters in Davangere.

The driver, Mohammed Rafique, was critically injured during the accident in the early hours of Thursday.

Following the crash, Rafique was rushed to the Karnataka Institute of Medical Sciences at Hubballi.

Despite undergoing emergency surgery, he succumbed to his injuries on Friday morning, they said.

Regarding the train fare hike by the Union government, the Chief Minister said, "The BJP will not speak on the train fare hike. If we do it, then all the leaders will start talking about it. The people themselves will teach a lesson to the BJP leaders for their cunning silence."

On his Delhi visit, Siddaramaiah said, "I am going for the Congress Working Committee meeting. I don't go to Delhi frequently." *—PTI*

A bus caught fire after coliding with a speeding truck, in Chitradurga, early Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

MAKE IN INDIA ROW

Vaishnaw is stealing credit for State's achievements: CM

BENGALURU, 26 DEC

- Vaishnaw said that Foxconn's hiring spree was due to the'Make in India', while praising the Karnataka ecosystem

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday hit out at Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, accusing him of 'stealing Karnataka's success' by taking credit for achievements of the state.

He questioned why the 'double-engine governments' are unable to match Karnataka's progress.

Siddaramaiah's remarks came after Vaishnaw thanked the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in a social media post for 'acknowledging the success' of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Make in India' programme.

Vaishnaw was responding to a recent Facebook post by Gandhi in which he shared a news report titled "Foxconn Hires 30,000 Staff at New, Women-led Unit" and praised Karnataka for setting an example by creating an ecosystem where manufacturing can grow at such scale and speed.

Taiwanese electronics giant Foxconn is the largest manufacturer of iPhones, and its second-biggest facility outside China is in Devanahalli.

Hitting out, Siddaramaiah said in a post on X, "If Make in India is truly a success, why can't BJP's 'double-engine' states match what Karnataka has delivered?" "When you have no achievements to show, you steal others' success and take the credit," he claimed. *—PTI*

Nurse murdered in City; colleague held

BENGALURU, 26 DEC

A 39-year-old staff nurse of a hospital here has been allegedly murdered by her junior colleague, with whom she was in a relationship, police said on Friday.

The deceased, Mamatha, hailing from Hiriyur in Chitradurga district, had been working at Jayadeva Hospital, where she entered into a relationship with her junior colleague C Sudhakar, 25. As she started insisting on marrying, the man allegedly hacked her to death, police said.

The incident at the woman's rented house in Kumarswamy Layout came to light on Thursday after she did not respond to repeated calls from her family, who then alerted the landlord, police said.

"Mamatha and Sudhakar were in a relationship, but when she insisted on marriage, she came to know that he was already engaged.

Despite this, she continued to press him to marry her. On the day of the incident, when he visited her house, they had a heated argument over the issue," a senior police officer said.

In a fit of rage, Sudhakar allegedly took a kitchen knife and slit her throat, the officer said. Before fleeing the spot, he also allegedly took away her gold chain to mislead investigators into suspecting a robbery angle, he added.

"A case of murder has been registered, and the accused has been arrested," the officer said. *—PTI*

State MPs back Belagavi DC as banned M'rashtra MP files plaint

BELAGAVI, 26 DEC

Karnataka MPs have decided to extend support to Belagavi Deputy Commissioner Mohammed Roshan after a breach of privilege complaint was filed against him by Maharashtra MP Dhairyasheel Mane.

State Minister Satish Jarkiholi said all 28 MPs from Karnataka would write to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, urging him not to admit the complaint.

The Deputy Commissioner was right as he imposed a ban on Mane to maintain law and order, he said, adding that "We stand Roshan in this case."

Belagavi BJP MP Jagadish Shettar also defended the district administration, stating that the action was situation-specific and did not amount to a breach of privilege.

"All MPs from the State will place facts before the Speaker. We will meet him soon under the leadership of Union Minister Pralhad Joshi," he said.

Mane, who represents Hatkanangale in Maharashtra, alleged that he was unlawfully prevented from entering Belagavi district on 1 November during the observance of a 'Black Day' by pro-Maharashtra groups.

In his complaint to the Speaker, Mane claimed that as an MP, he has the right to travel freely across the country and that the district administration violated his constitutional rights.

The restriction was imposed on Karnataka Rajyotsava day, which coincides with the annual 'Black Day' observed by the Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (MES) and Marathi-speaking residents. The day is marked to protest the inclusion of Belagavi in Karnataka following the linguistic reorganisation of States in 1956. *— Salar News*

Belagavi in-charge Miniser Satish Jarkiholi backed the Belagavi DC *PHOTO: X/ SATISH JARKIHOLI*

Kerala CM slams Cong's 'bulldozer justice' in City

T'PURAM, 26 DEC

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Friday criticised the reported demolition of Muslim residential areas in Bengaluru, calling it "bulldozer justice".

In a Facebook post, Vijayan referred to the reported bulldozing of Fakir Colony and Waseem Layout, where Muslim families had been living for many years.

He said the incident reflected a form of minority-targeting politics seen earlier in North India and warned that such practices were now spreading to the South. He alleged that entire families were forced out of their homes in harsh winter conditions.

Vijayan expressed surprise that "bulldozer justice" was carried out under a Congress-led government. He questioned how such forced evictions could be justified by a party that claims to stand for social justice.

A demolition drive in Kogilu village at Yelahanka last week pulled down more than 200 houses in Waseem Layout and Fakir Colony, reports said. The operation was reportedly carried out by Bengaluru Solid Waste Management Limited. Reports said the houses were removed to clear alleged encroachments on land marked for a proposed waste processing unit. *—PTI*

LIVING IN THE MOMENT

People pose with folk artists during the 2nd day of Ayurveda World Summit at Palace Grounds in Bengaluru, on Friday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

HM rejects Shettar's claims of administrative collapse

BENGALURU, 26 DEC

Home Minister G Parameshwara dismissed former chief minister Jagadish Shettar's claims of an imminent collapse of the Congress-led government, asserting that the administration is stable and functioning smoothly. Paramesh wara accused the opposition of attempting to create a false narrative to mislead the public.

"Nothing has happened. Our government and administration are functioning well," Parameshwara told reporters in Bengaluru on Friday.

Parameshwara's remarks came in response to Shettar's renewed attack on the Congress leadership, in which the BJP MP claimed that a serious power struggle between Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar could lead to the collapse of the government.

Shettar alleged that the tussle was benefiting the BJP, citing recent by-election results as evidence of shifting public support. He accused the State government of administrative breakdown, rising corruption, and unresponsive officials, claiming it had adversely affected law and order. *— ANI*

FINANCIAL MISMANAGEMENT

Govt team finds irregularities in medicine bill at BRIMS

BIDAR. 26 DEC

The investigation team constituted by the State government has found large-scale irregularities in the Bidar Institute of Medical Sciences (BRIMS). Retired judge SJ Palled, who headed the investigation, has found irregularities in decisions made by BRIMS Director Dr Shivakumar Shetkhar, including in recruitment to posts, payments made to institutions, and the purchase of medicines.

Among other irregularities, a single payment of Rs 1.54 crore was made to the Manjira Institution. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) conducted an audit of BRIMS accounts for the period from 2019–20 to 2022–23 and prepared an audit report highlighting several lapses.

The investigation team found that objections were raised regarding the payment but, there is no information on whether the Accountant General has accepted the explanations.

The report submitted to the Medical Education Department states that such irregular payments of institutional funds have caused financial loss to both the institution and the government.

During the financial years 2023 to 2025, under the Ayushman Bharat scheme, expenditures and related documents, as well as purchases of medicines and chemical materials under budget reveal that procurements were made through quotations instead of tenders, and payments were released accordingly. However, stock registers were not maintained.

The Medical Education Department has already issued a notice to Shetkhar and has stated that action will be taken even if no reply is submitted. *—Salar News*

NIA probes helium gas cylinder blast outside Mysuru Palace that killed 1

BENGALURU, 26 DEC

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has requested details regarding the helium gas cylinder explosion that occurred on Thursday evening outside the Mysuru Palace. However, district in-charge minister HC Mahadevappa said that the incident was routine, stating that there is no evidence of foul play. After meeting with the injured and their families, he confirmed that state police would cooperate with the NIA who investigate such incidents in the national interest.

"The balloon seller, Salim from Uttar Pradesh, was in the city like other street vendors, selling balloons near the Mysuru Palace gates. He lived in a rented house in Mandi Mohalla for the past 15 days and is an innocent man," Mahadevappa stated. He assured that the government would provide free treatment for all injured parties, emphasising, "As Mysuru is a tourist spot, I have instructed police to implement extra precaution and security measures."

Salim died at the scene on Thursday night while filling balloons, and Manjula, aged 40, succumbed to her injuries on Friday despite medical efforts. A total of five individuals, including three women, were injured and are currently receiving treatment at KR Hospital. *—Salar News*

Police personnel cordon off an area after a blast outside the Amba Vilas Palace, in Mysuru *PHOTO: PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Manmohan Singh remembered on death anniversary

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

Congress leaders paid tributes to former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on his first death anniversary, saying his honesty and legacy would continue to inspire future generations. Describing Singh as a transformative leader, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge said he reshaped the country's economy through economic reforms. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi also paid tributes to the former PM. "He empowered India economically. His historic efforts and bold decisions gave India a new identity," Gandhi said. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said, "Manmohan Singh ji was a strong believer in equality. His honesty and dedication will always inspire us." Singh, who served as prime minister from 2004 to 2014, died last year at the age of 92.—*PTI*

Tripura Assembly Speaker Biswa Bandhu Sen dies

AGARTALA, 26 DEC

Tripura Assembly Speaker Biswa Bandhu Sen died at a private hospital in Bengaluru on Friday at 72 while undergoing treatment after a cerebral stroke, officials said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi condoled the Speaker's death and recalled his efforts to boost Tripura's progress. Survived by wife, son and a daughter, Sen's body will be brought to Agartala on Saturday. A four-time MLA from the Dharmanagar Assembly constituency in North Tripura, Sen had a long political career. He was first elected on a Congress ticket, joined the TMC in June 2016 and later joined BJP ahead of 2018 Assembly elections. Chief Minister Manik Saha also expressed grief over Sen's demise. The state government has declared a three-day state mourning from Friday. —*PTI*

BJP leader seeks removal of videos implicating murder

DEHRADUN, 26 DEC

BJP leader Dushyant Kumar Gautam is urging the Uttarakhand government to remove social media audio and video content linking him to the murder of Ankita Bhandari. The BJP leader, in a letter to Uttarakhand Home Secretary Shailesh Bagoli, requested the removal of the implicating content, citing that it maligns his image. The controversy stems from a viral audio conversation claiming that Gautam, referred to as "Gattu," was involved in the 2022 Ankita Bhandari murder. Gautam also submitted a list of social media accounts and news channels that he claimed made "false and malicious" allegations. BJP has dismissed Sanawar as a woman involved in "questionable" social activities, while Congress has sought a CBI probe into allegations. —*PTI*

Yaba tablets worth ₹40 cr seized in Manipur, one held

IMPHAL, 26 DEC

In a joint operation on 24 December, Assam Rifles and Manipur Police seized 1.6 lakh banned Yaba tablets worth around Rs 40 crore in Jiribam district, arresting one person. Yaba, or "crazy medicine" in Thai, is a highly addictive methamphetamine-caffeine drug that severely affects the central nervous system. The seized contraband and the arrested individual were handed over to Jiribam police for further investigation, underscoring efforts to curb drug trafficking. Since ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups in Manipur two years ago, over 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless. The Centre, on 13 February, had imposed the President's rule in the state after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned. —*PTI*

India flags concern over H1B visa interview cancellations

Thousands of interviews were postponed by several months

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

PHOTO: ANI

India on Friday said it flagged its concerns to the US over cancellation of pre-scheduled H1B visa interviews of large numbers of Indian applicants and that both sides are engaged on the issue.

The interviews of thousands of H1B visa applicants slated from the middle of this month in India have been abruptly postponed by several months to scrutinise their social media posts and online profiles.

Some of the applicants, whose visa appointments were scheduled last week, received e-mails from US immigration authorities informing that their interviews are being pushed back as late as May next year.

The government of India has received several representations from Indian nationals who are facing problems with their rescheduling of their visa appointments, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson **Randhir Jaiswal** said at his weekly media briefing.

Visa-related issues pertain to the sovereign domain of any country, he said, adding: "we have flagged these issues and our concerns to the US side, both here in New Delhi and in Washington DC."

Jaiswal said several Indians have been stranded for extended periods of time in India causing a lot of "hardships" to them and their families.

"The government of India remains actively engaged with the US side to minimise the disruptions caused to our nationals," he said.

The mass cancellation of scheduled interviews of the H-1B visa applicants in view of the enhanced vetting measures has resulted in significant delays in their return to the US.

The rescheduling of the interviews is for all applicants who were previously given appointments from December 15 onwards.

Most of them were already in India and are now unable to return to the US pending their new interview dates since they don't have a valid H1B visa to travel back to the US for their jobs. —*PTI*

'A HISTORIC DAY'

BJP marks milestone with its 1st mayor

>>>CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

BJP State President Rajeev Chandrasekhar said it was a historic day for the party in Kerala.

He said the mayor was selected by the party leadership and ruled out any controversy over not electing former DGP R Sreelekha for the post.

Union Minister Suresh Gopi said the BJP should have come to power in the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation in the 2020 local body elections.

"The factors that prevented that have been squared away this time," he said.

Asked about the possibility of the BJP coming to power in the 2026 Assembly elections in the wake of the victory in the capital city, Gopi said the party would make step-by-step progress through hard work.

VV Rajesh PHOTO: PTI

In Kollam Corporation, UDF's AK Hafeez was elected mayor, while in Kochi Corporation, UDF councillor VK Minimol, a four-time councillor, was elected mayor.

In Thrissur Corporation, Dr Niji Justin of the UDF was elected mayor, prompting dissent from another councillor, Lali James, who alleged she was denied the post after leaders took bribes.

Another milestone was reported in Pala municipality, where 21-year-old Diya Binu Pulikkankandam was elected chairperson with UDF support, making her the youngest municipal chairperson in Kerala.

Apart from the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, BJP also won in Municipalities of Tripunithura and Palakkad. In the evening, elections to the deputy mayor and vice-chairperson posts were held at the Corporations and Municipalities. —*PTI*

Prez Droupadi Murmu, VP CP Radhakrishnan & Union Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal at the release of Constitution in the Santhali language, in New Delhi, on Friday PHOTO: PTI

Modi hails release of Constitution in Santhali

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

- Santhali, one of India's most ancient living languages, was included in the Eighth Schedule through the 92nd Constitutional Amendment in 2003 and is widely spoken

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday hailed the release of the Constitution in the Santhali language as a "commendable effort" that would deepen constitutional awareness and democratic participation, while reiterating the government's commitment to reforms aimed at improving citizens' ease of living.

"The Constitution in Santhali language will help deepen constitutional awareness and democratic participation," Modi said in a post on X, adding that the nation was proud of Santhali culture and the community's contribution to national progress. President Droupadi Murmu had released the Santhali version of the Constitution on Thursday.

Santhali, one of India's most ancient living languages, was included in the Eighth Schedule through the 92nd Constitutional Amendment in 2003 and is widely spoken among tribal communities in Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal and Bihar.

In separate posts highlighting governance reforms, Modi said the government's reform trajectory would continue "with even more vigour", stressing that the real test of reform is whether it reduces stress for people. Using the hashtags #ReformInAction and #GoodGovernance, the government said recent reforms prioritised outcomes over complexity.

According to official posts, tax relief has translated into zero income tax for earnings up to Rs 12 lakh, while the Income Tax Act, 2025 simplified compliance and enhanced transparency. MSMEs now enjoy higher investment and turnover limits, labour laws have been consolidated into four codes, and GST processes streamlined. —*PTI*

Mirwaiz drops 'Hurriyat' title from X

SRINAGAR, 26 DEC

Moderate separatist leader and chief cleric of Kashmir, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, has removed the title "Chairman, All Parties Hurriyat Conference" (APHC) from his verified X profile, a decision he termed a "Hobson's choice". This change, noted on Thursday, is viewed as a significant blow to the APHC, a coalition of separatist groups formed in 1993 to advocate for the alleged right to self-determination in Kashmir. Mirwaiz's profile now includes only his name and basic details, as he explained the alteration was made under "significant pressure" from

Mirwaiz Umar Farooq PHOTO: ANI

authorities citing the ban on his party, the Awami Action Committee, and other APHC constituents.

He stated, "At a time when public space and avenues of communication stand severely restricted, this platform remains among the very few means available to me to reach out to my people... Under such circumstances, it is a Hobson's choice I was left to make."

Mirwaiz has also been placed under house arrest, halting him from attending Friday prayers at the historic Jamia Masjid in Srinagar. His office condemned the detention, stating that peaceful religious activity has been unjustly curtailed. The spokesperson asserted, "Curtailing peaceful religious or community activity is very sad and unjust."

The repercussions of his recent title removal have sparked mixed reactions across Jammu and Kashmir's political landscape, with calls for understanding from some leaders, while others have attempted to criticise him. —*PTI*

BLO hangs self in UP, family cites workload

SITAPUR, 26 DEC

A Booth Level Officer (BLO) deployed for SIR duty allegedly committed suicide by hanging at his rented room in Uttar Pradesh's Sitapur, police said on Friday.

According to Ataria police station in-charge Inspector Rakesh Kumar Gupta, the deceased was identified as Umesh, 30, a resident of Rampur Kala police station area, liaved in a rented house in Ataria town and was employed as an instructor at Dariyapur pre-secondary school.

According to family members, Umesh had recently been assigned duties as a BLO under the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise and was under pressure due to the increased workload.

However, the exact reason behind the suicide is yet to be ascertained. The dead body was sent to postmortem. —*PTI*

OPPOSING BJP'S 15 SEATS OFFER

Pune polls: Sena protests outside Gorhe's home

PUNE, 26 DEC

Shiv Sena workers on Friday staged a protest outside senior leader Neelam Gorhe's residence in Pune, opposing the BJP's "offer" of 15 seats to the party for the 15 January Pune Municipal Corporation polls.

Earlier in the day, Gorhe said Shiv Sena had sought 35 seats. She told reporters that the BJP initially offered 12 seats, which was later revised to 15 after discussions involving Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, who heads the Shiv Sena, and Industries Minister Uday Samant.

The revised proposal, however, triggered resentment among party workers and ticket aspirants, who gathered outside Gorhe's Model Colony home. "On what basis will the party distribute tickets? If our demand was 35 to 40 seats, why did the leaders settle for just 15?" a worker asked.

In the 2017 Pune civic polls, the BJP won 97 of the 162 seats, followed by the NCP with 39, while the undivided Shiv Sena secured 10 seats.

Another protester alleged that tickets were being distributed on a "commercial" basis. "Decisions are being taken by four select persons, and party workers' opinions are ignored," he alleged, naming Gorhe, city unit president Pramod Nana Bhangire and Purandar MLA Vijay Shivtare.

Police were deployed outside the residence as the protest continued.

Gorhe said she conveyed the offer, with the decision to be taken by Eknath Shinde.—*PTI*

Satheesan flays Kerala CM over Sonia photo row

KOCHI, 26 DEC

The Leader of the Opposition in the Kerala Assembly, **VD Satheesan**, criticised Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan over his recent remarks pointing to a photograph of Sabarimala gold loss case accused Unnikrishnan Potty along with Congress leader Sonia Gandhi.

Addressing reporters here on Friday, Satheesan said two CPI (M) leaders are behind bars after being arrested in the Sabarimala case, but no action has been taken by the CPI (M).

"There is a photograph of Potty with the CM. Did we say that the CM is an accused in the Sabarimala case?" he asked.

Satheesan said people like Potty take photographs with various leaders.

"The real issue is that when the LDF was in power, gold from Sabarimala was lost and two CPI (M) leaders are in jail for it," he said.

He said the investigation should be extended to the "big fish" and that courts also said that.

"They are diverting attention towards photographs to cover up the real issue," he said. —*PTI*

'No conflict between science and dharma'

TIRUPATI, 26 DEC

RSS Chief **Mohan Bhagwat** on Friday said there was no conflict between science and dharma, asserting that both seek the same truth through different methods.

Addressing the Bharatiya Vigyan Sammelan, Bhagwat said dharma is often mistaken for religion, whereas it is the law governing creation. "Dharma is not religion. It is the law by which creation runs," he said, warning that imbalance leads to destruction.

He said science historically distanced itself from dharma on the assumption it had no role in inquiry, calling such a view incorrect.

According to Bhagwat, science and spirituality differ only in methodology: science relies on external observation, experimentation and repeatable experience, while spirituality follows the same principle through inner experience, insisting that truth be accessible to all.

He said modern science is increasingly discussing consciousness as universal, echoing ancient Indian concepts.

He underlined the role of Indian languages in conveying dharma and called for communicating scientific knowledge in mother tongues. —*PTI*

AHEAD OF PLUNGE INTO POLITICS

Vijay's final song ramps up excitement

CHENNAI, 26 DEC

Actor **Vijay**'s final film 'Jana Nayagan' ramps up excitement with the third single 'Chella Magale' releasing on Friday at 5.04pm.

The song was sung by the superstar himself.

On 27 December, the makers have also scheduled a grand audio launch in Malaysia, while the trailer will be released on New Year's Day.

"Jana Nayagan", Directed by H Vinoth, is a political action thriller and it marks Vijay's cinematic swansong before his full-time plunge into politics.

"Chella Magale", composed by Anirudh Ravichander, features Vijay in a touching father-daughter moment as teased in the poster.

Social media is already abuzz with fans' excitement, who hail it as an emotional highlight following foot-tapping songs, "Thalapathy Kacheri" and "Oru Pere Varalaaru" -- both are already declared massive hits that celebrate his legacy.

Made on a Rs 300 crore budget by KVN Productions, "Jana Nayagan" stars Pooja Hegde, Bobby Deol, Prakash Raj, Priyamani, Gautham Vasudev Menon and Mamitha Baiju in key roles.

Sources said the three-hour-six-minute saga packs 10 high-octane action sequences with political undertones. The film is also likely to be released in Hindi as "Jan Neta".

The sold-out audio launch at Kuala Lumpur's Stadium Bukit Jalil, dubbed "Thalapathy Thiruvizha" with Anirudh headlining, expects 90,000 fans, but drew flak over Malaysian police bans on political speeches, TVK symbols, banners or messaging.

As per news reports, Malaysian authorities warn of strict action if the event is not kept "entertainment only". —*PTI*

Dehlvi Group celebrates glorious centenary at Jaipur

The Dehlvi Group of Companies marked its grand centenary celebration at the historic Bhanwar Singh Palace, Jaipur, Rajasthan, in a truly memorable manner. The three-day celebration was held from 17 to 19 December and witnessed the presence of eminent personalities from the Unani fraternity.

The event brought together renowned Hakims, doctors, distributors, agencies, and others from across the country. As special invitees, Dr Sajid Nisar from Jodhpur, Syed Arif Zaidi from Delhi, and Hakim Anisuzzaman from Sasaram graced the occasion.

The first day commenced with a Mushaira evening, featuring some of India's most promising poets. On the second day, Chairman of the Dehlvi Group, Hakim Mohsin Dehlvi, shared the remarkable 100-year journey of the Dehlvi Group. His son, Monis Dehlvi, company Director, outlined the future vision of the organisation.

Speaking on the occasion, Syed Arif Zaidi highlighted that Unani medicine is currently being used across nearly 88 countries. He emphasized that Dehlvi has always been known for manufacturing high-quality products using premium-grade ingredients.

Adding excitement to the grand celebration, a Lucky Draw Ceremony was organised. The winners are:

Gold Category. Altroz Car: Arshad Siddiqui, Hamdard Agency, Bettiah, Bihar

Silver Category. Royal Enfield Bullet: Mohd Saquib, Oudh Store

Bronze Category. Jupiter Activa: Aman Ayurveda, Dasuya, Punjab

Advertorial*

SIT extends Sabarimala gold loss probe to TN

T'PURAM, 26 DEC

The Special Investigation Team has extended its probe into Tamil Nadu in the Sabarimala gold loss case as pilgrim footfall this season crossed 30 lakh, officials said. The SIT searched for a Dindigul-based jeweller, Balamurughan alias D Mani, after Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala alleged links to an international antique racket. A businessman claiming to be Subramaniam, also known as MS Mani, denied involvement, prompting the SIT to issue a notice for interrogation to determine his identity. The team is also searching for an associate. Meanwhile, official data showed that over 30 lakh devotees had darshan so far, over two lakh fewer than last year, amid stricter High Court-mandated crowd controls. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

'Dhurandhar' earns over Rs 1K cr at box office worldwide

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

Filmmaker Aditya Dhar's latest directorial venture, 'Dhurandhar,' has achieved a remarkable milestone by surpassing the Rs 1000 crore mark at the worldwide box office, according to the producers. The film stars Ranveer Singh alongside notable actors Sanjay Dutt, Akshaye Khanna, Arjun Rampal, Sara Arjun, R. Madhavan, and Rakesh Bedi. Produced by Dhar and his brother Lokesh Dhar under B62 Studios, in collaboration with Jyoti Deshpande of Jio Studios, the film has grossed Rs 789.8 crore domestically. The story dives into an underworld saga filled with covert operations and betrayals. Released on 5 December, the makers announced a sequel set for 19 March, 2026, adding, "Entering the 1000 CR club, loud and proud." —*PTI*

Mumbai, Kanpur school staff booked for harassment

KANPUR/MUMBAI, 26 DEC

Four staff members of a private school in Kanpur booked for allegedly harassing an eight-year-old boy accusing him of stealing a pen, police said on Friday. The incident came to light after the Class 2 student began displaying signs of being disturbed, by writing "Help" in his books and the walls of his house and crying in his sleep, according to a complaint filed by the boy's parents. Following the complaint, an FIR was registered on 23 December against four staff members of the private school at Sen Paschim Para in Kanpur. On the other hand, two teachers from a private school in Navi Mumbai have been booked for harassing a 6-year-old student. —*PTI*

Teen designer who lost job to AI held for jewellery theft

INDORE, 26 DEC

An 18-year-old graphic designer who claimed he lost his job to artificial intelligence was arrested with his doctor-aspirant friend for allegedly stealing jewellery worth Rs 16.17 lakh, police said. The duo, both 18, allegedly stole gold, silver and diamond ornaments from a shop in Indore's Rau area on December 22 and fled to Bhopal, where the stolen valuables were recovered, Deputy Commissioner of Police Shrikrishna Lalchandani said. Without disclosing identities, he said the two had known each other since childhood and were inspired by the 2005 film Bunty Aur Babli. During interrogation, the man said he lost part-time work after his firm adopted AI and struggled financially. The accused, from weak backgrounds, told police they failed to sell the jewellery as buyers offered prices and planned to sell it later. —*PTI*

Unnao rape survivor's mom protests outside Delhi HC

Will move SC for justice; demands cancellation of Sengar's bail

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

The Unnao rape survivor's mother on Friday said she would move the Supreme Court challenging the suspension of the life sentence of convict Kuldeep Singh Sengar, as she joined a protest outside the Delhi High Court against last week's verdict.

Activists of the All India Democratic Women's Association, along with Yogita Bhayana and the survivor's mother, held the demonstration seeking cancellation of bail granted to Sengar, an expelled BJP MLA.

Speaking to PTI, the mother said her daughter had suffered immensely and the decision had shaken her faith.

"I am not blaming the entire high court, but only the two judges whose decision has shattered our trust," she said.

"Earlier judges delivered justice to us, but now the accused has been given bail. This is injustice. We will go to the Supreme Court, as I have faith in it," she added.

Protesters held placards and raised slogans demanding that Sengar's life sentence be upheld and that protection to rapists and convicts stop.

Some demonstrators criticised the Centre and questioned the timing of the bail order, alleging it was granted just before court holidays.

Agitators, including women activists, hold placards as they stage a demonstration against the suspension of the jail term of Kuldeep Sengar, an ex-BJP MLA who was convicted in the Unnao rape case, outside the Delhi High Court, in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

As the protest continued, Delhi Police warned that demonstrations outside the High Court were prohibited and directed them to shift to Jantar Mantar.

On Tuesday, the High Court suspended Sengar's life sentence and granted him bail pending disposal of his appeal against the 2019 conviction.

The court barred the former BJP MLA from entering within five kilometres of the survivor's home or threatening her family, warning bail would be cancelled for any violation.

However, Sengar will remain in jail as he is also serving a 10-year sentence in the custodial death case of the survivor's father. He has not been granted bail in that matter. The family continues to seek justice through lawful democratic means. —*PTI*

Assam's Karbi Anglong sees normalcy

DIPHU/GUWAHATI, 26 DEC

Normalcy is returning to violence-hit areas of Assam's West Karbi Anglong district with no fresh incidents. The State government, autonomous council, and protestors will hold a meeting in Guwahati on Friday.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and KAAC chief Tuliram Ronghang will attend the meeting, an official said.

Strict vigil is being maintained in the affected areas, after two persons were killed and several others, including police personnel, were injured.

Strict vigil is being maintained in the affected areas, after two persons were killed and several others, were injured **PHOTO: PTI**

He added that no violence has been reported as the Army, the RAF and the CRPF were deployed in the area.

The worst-hit Kheroni area in the district houses people from Bihari, Bengali and Nepali communities apart from Karbis.

The indigenous Karbi and the Bihari communities have been at loggerheads in West Karbi Anglong district over allegations of encroachment on Village Grazing Reserve (VGR) and Professional Grazing Reserve (PGR) lands in the tribal belts by Hindi-speaking people.

Protestors from the Karbi community had been on a hunger strike for 15 days, demanding the eviction of alleged illegal settlers, who mostly hail from Bihar, from the VGR and PGR lands in the two districts of Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong.

They went on a rampage on Monday after police took away three of them from the protest site, a move which the administration later claimed was for their hospitalisation. —*PTI*

'WHY IT'S UNAFFORDABLE'

HC gives govt 10 days to reply on air purifier GST

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

The Delhi High Court on Friday asked the Centre why it cannot reduce the GST charged on air purifiers to make it affordable for the common man in view of the worsening air quality in the national capital and nearby areas.

The court, further, gave the Centre 10 days to file its reply on a plea seeking a reduction in GST on air purifiers.

A vacation bench of Justices Vikas Mahajan and Vinod Kumar listed the matter for 9 January, granting time after the Centre said decisions on GST require consensus among states and Union territories through the GST Council.

Additional Solicitor General N Venkataraman said voting must be held physically and cannot be done via video conferencing, adding the government would file an "extremely detailed" counter affidavit.

The bench asked why GST should not be cut from 18 per cent to five per cent, noting air purifiers cost between Rs 10,000 and Rs 60,000 and are beyond the reach of the common man.

The court was hearing a PIL by advocate Kapil Madan seeking classification of air purifiers as "medical devices" and a lower tax slab, arguing they are essential amid an "extreme emergency" pollution crisis.

While the ASG flagged constitutional concerns and urged more time, the court said the issue required deliberation and called for a detailed response.

On 24 December, the court had asked the GST Council to meet urgently and consider lowering or scrapping the levy, amid 'very poor' AQI levels in Delhi. —*PTI*

Maintain curbs as pollution may rise again: Env minister Sirsa

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

Even as GRAP 4 restrictions were lifted after a temporary improvement in air quality, Delhi Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa on Friday urged residents to continue pollution-control measures, warning that conditions may worsen due to an approaching western disturbance.

Addressing the media, Sirsa said conditions were likely to turn unfavourable, with dense haze and fog worsening pollution levels. "According to the weather department and past data, the impact of the western disturbance will be visible in Delhi in the next couple of days," he said.

The minister appealed to citizens to remain vigilant, avoid unnecessary travel, and not use vehicles without valid PUC certificates. He also urged people not to burn garbage or light fires at night, noting that biomass burning significantly contributes to pollution.

Sirsa warned fog could again turn into smog, stressing the clear weather may not last and collective efforts were needed to keep air clean. Vehicles below BS-VI norms remain allowed. —*PTI*

ACCUSED HAILS FROM UP

ED books Islamic preacher in money laundering case

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) said it has registered a money laundering case against an Islamic preacher hailing from Uttar Pradesh and based in the UK with radical links, including with a Pakistani outfit, officials said.

The case against Maulana Shamsul Huda Khan under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) stems from an FIR registered by the UP Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS).

Khan was appointed as an Assistant Teacher in an Uttar Pradesh government-aided madrassa in 1984.

He acquired British citizenship in 2013 but it is claimed that he continued to draw a salary from 2013-2017 despite neither being an Indian citizen nor discharging teaching duties.

Khan could not be contacted for his reaction.

The ED said that Khan travelled to several foreign countries in the last 20 years and is alleged to have got funds through seven to eight bank accounts in India. About a dozen immovable assets worth about Rs 30 crore were also reportedly "acquired" him. —*PTI*

70 detained, 6 cops hurt in stone pelting outside Jaipur mosque

JAIPUR, 26 DEC

More than 70 people were detained after stone pelting during an anti-encroachment drive outside a mosque in Jaipur district early Friday, police said. Six policemen were injured in the violence near the bus stand in Chomu, about 40km from Jaipur, around 3am.

Tension flared when police moved to remove iron railings erected along the road outside the mosque. The crowd allegedly pelted stones, forcing police to fire tear gas shells and use mild force to disperse them, officials said. Local residents and traders had complained that the encroachment caused frequent traffic congestion.

"The situation is completely under control now. Strict action will be taken against those who took the law into their hands," DGP (Law and Order) Sanjay Agarwal said. "Seventy people have been detained for their involvement in the incident," Chomu DSP Usha Yadav said.

Police being deployed after a stone pelting incident in Chomu, in Jaipur on Friday **PHOTO: ANI VIDEOGRAB**

Police said talks were held on Thursday evening between the administration and members of one community on removing stones encroaching on the road outside the mosque, and they agreed to do so.

However, after the stones were removed, some people allegedly began installing iron railings to create a boundary, triggering fresh objections. Additional police were deployed, internet services suspended for 24 hours, and flag marches conducted to maintain order. —*PTI*

Kashmiri seller forced to chant slogans in U'khand

KASHIPUR, 26 DEC

A Kashmiri shawl seller was allegedly assaulted and forced to chant religious slogans by unidentified persons in Udham Singh Nagar, police said on Friday. A case has registered and some suspects detained.

Senior Superintendent of Police Manikant Mishra said action followed after a video of the 22 December incident surfaced on social media and was removed to prevent tension.

The complainant, Bilal Ahmed, 30, said six men stopped him near Ujala Hospital in Manpur and pressured him to chant slogans. On refusal, they abused and assaulted him, tried to snatch his warm clothes and cash, and threatened to kill him if he returned to sell goods. —*PTI*

MADURAI HC TELLS CENTRE

'Need Aus-like law on kids' internet use'

MADURAI, 26 DEC

The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court has said the Centre could consider framing legislation to regulate children's internet use, drawing reference to Australia's law restricting social media access for minors below 16.

A division bench of Justices G Jayachandran and KK Ramakrishnan observed that until such a law is enacted, the state and National Commissions for Protection of Child Rights could prepare an action plan to create awareness among children about child rights and safe online behaviour.

The court flagged concerns over minors' exposure to harmful and pornographic content on digital platforms and said regulatory safeguards were needed to address growing risks associated with unrestricted internet access.

PHOTO: PTI

The observations came while hearing a public interest litigation filed by S Vijayakumar, who sought directions to internet service providers to offer a "parental window" service and to mandate awareness programmes for children through appropriate authorities.

Appearing for the petitioner, counsel KPS Palanivel Rajan cited a recently introduced Australian law that bans social media use by children under 16 and submitted that India could explore a similar statutory framework.

The bench noted that such a framework could help restrict access to age-inappropriate content and encourage responsible digital practices among children.

While stopping short of issuing binding directions to the Centre, the court said the proposed awareness measures could serve as an interim step until comprehensive legislation is considered.

The matter highlights increasing judicial concern over child safety in the digital content consumtion. —*PTI*

Mediation not weakness but law's highest form: CJI

PANAJI, 26 DEC

Mediation is not a sign of the law's weakness, but rather its highest evolutionary form, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said here on Friday.

He was addressing the conference 'Mediation: How significant in the present-day context,' organised by the India International University of Legal Education and Research at Sancoale village in South Goa.

"Mediation is not a sign of the law's weakness, but rather its highest evolutionary form. It is a true transition from a culture of adjudication to a culture of participation where we cultivate harmony," said the CJI.

The CJI said he envisions a transition towards a multi-door courthouse where the court is a comprehensive centre for dispute resolution and not merely a place for trial.

Earlier, the CJI took part in a symbolic walk for 'Mediation Awareness' near Kala Academy in Panaji. "Mediation is being accepted as successful and cost-effective. It is a win-win situation for both parties as it is a settlement," he said. —*PTI*

21 YEARS SINCE TSUNAMI

People gather at Pattinapakkam beach, in Chennai, on Friday to pay tribute to the victims of the 2004 tsunami on the 21st anniversary of the tragedy, which killed over 35,000 people. The national ceremony was marked by a two-minute silence observed across the island between 9:25 am and 9:27 am, coinciding with the time the giant waves struck the country's coastline on 26 December, 2004 ***PHOTO: PTI***

Pollution India's biggest health crisis after Covid

Air pollution is arguably the biggest public health crisis India has faced since the pandemic and will continue to worsen each year unless urgent action is taken, a UK-based Indian-origin pulmonologist warned, noting that a looming tsunami of airway disease remains largely underdiagnosed.

Speaking to PTI, multiple senior doctors practising in the UK asserted that a vast, hidden burden of undiagnosed airway disease is "building beneath the surface" and its incoming wave will exact a heavy, lasting toll on Indian citizens.

They linked the global rise in cardiovascular diseases to increasing exposure to transport emissions, including automobiles and aircraft, particularly in cities across India, the UK and beyond, rather than obesity alone.

Union transport minister Nitin Gadkari on Tuesday admitted that nearly 40 per cent of the pollution in Delhi is caused by the transport sector due to dependence on fossil fuels, while emphasising the need for cleaner alternatives, and biofuel adoption.

During the recently concluded winter session, the government said that there is no conclusive data establishing a direct correlation between higher Air Quality Index (AQI) levels and lung diseases, despite acknowledging that air pollution is one of the factors for respiratory associated diseases.

"The Indian government's renewed focus on controlling air pollution is necessary and overdue. However, it is time to confront an uncomfortable truth: for millions living in North India, the damage has already been done," Consultant Pulmonologist and a former Covid-19 Advisory Committee Member of India, Manish Gautam, told PTI.

He cautioned that years of exposure mean that a lung health emergency is unfolding, while urging the policymakers to focus on early detection and treatment and consider establishing a rapid "lung health task group".

People moving in a layer of fog in front of The India Gate, New Delhi on 24 December. The capital's Air Quality Index (AQI) moved to 'very poor' from 'severe', according to the Central Pollution Control Board ***PHOTO: PTI***

In December, Delhi hospitals witnessed 20 to 30 per cent spike in respiratory patients, including many first-time and young adults patients.

Gautam, further noted that while pollution control and prevention measures remain critical, they are no longer sufficient on their own.

The government reiterated in Parliament recently that there is no conclusive data establishing a direct causal link between air pollution and mortality or disease.

According to Rajay Narain, Honorary Cardiologist at St George's University Hospital in London, there is "overwhelming scientific evidence" linking air pollution to a range of diseases, including cardiovascular, respiratory, neurological and systemic, and any delay in addressing the issue will add to the health and economic burden.

He underscored that while short-term measures may reduce immediate exposure, the real solution lies in sustained, science-driven policies that prioritise clean air, protect vulnerable groups and hold stakeholders accountable.

"Many early symptoms, such as headaches, fatigue, mild cough, throat irritation, digestive discomfort, eye dryness, skin rashes and recurrent infections, are often dismissed but may represent early warning signs of serious chronic disease," Narain told PTI.

Data presented by the health ministry in Parliament stated that over 2 lakh cases of acute respiratory illness were recorded in Delhi over the past three years, with around 30,000 patients requiring hospitalisation.

Highlighting the factors that often go unnoticed, Professor Derek Connolly, a consultant cardiologist at the Midland Metropolitan University hospital in Birmingham, said that even on seemingly clean days, residents in polluted cities are exposed to invisible cardiovascular risks.

"People do not realise that cardiovascular disease is an extremely slow process, with episodes of rapid deterioration. This is a silent killer. Most people are unaware of their exposure because particulate matter is invisible and cannot be easily measured. We are all exposed to it, even on days when pollution does not seem too bad," Connolly told PTI.

PM2.5 pollution led to over 17 lakh deaths in India in 2022, of which the use of petrol for road transport contributed to 2.69 lakh deaths, the '2025 Report of The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change' said.

A global study by International Council on Clean Transportation revealed that policies targeting road transport emissions could save 1.9 million lives and prevent 1.4 million children's asthma cases worldwide by 2040.

Over the years, healthcare professionals have repeatedly flagged the widespread impact of air pollution on public health, highlighting the urgency for intervention. —PTI

SALAR

Ongoing disputes testing India-Bangladesh relation

Disputes over minority safety and diplomatic security have triggered retaliatory visa freezes between India and Bangladesh, disrupting medical travel and signalling a sharp deterioration in relations.

Diplomatic relations between India and Bangladesh have hit a critical juncture with Dhaka suspending visa and consular services at its missions in New Delhi and Agartala on 22 December following protests outside the facilities.

India has also suspended visa services at its Chittagong visa application centre in Bangladesh following widespread violent protests triggered by the death of prominent Bangladeshi activist Sharif Osman Hadi.

The 32-year-old was a fierce critic of India and a key figure in the 2024 uprising that ended the 15-year autocratic rule of former Bangladeshi prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

Hadi died on 18 December in a Singapore hospital, a week after being shot in the head in Dhaka by a masked motorbike rider.

Bangladesh's interim leader Muhammad Yunus has called the shooting a premeditated attack carried out by a powerful network aimed at derailing elections planned for February.

ENVOYS SUMMONED IN TIT-FOR-TAT MOVE

Tensions between India and Bangladesh further increased following the killing of Dipu Chandra Das, a 25-year-old Hindu man lynched and burned in public in Bangladesh's Mymensingh district over blasphemy allegations.

Several areas across India, including Kolkata and Hyderabad, witnessed protests by prominent Hindu groups seeking justice for Das. Many carried placards and banners with slogans including "India will not tolerate torture of Hindus in Bangladesh."

New Delhi and Dhaka summoned each other's envoys earlier this week to express concern over the situation that has escalated into reciprocal suspension of visa services and heightened tensions over minority safety and diplomatic security.

The visa freeze affects tens of thousands of Bangladeshis seeking medical treatment in India, creating a humanitarian dimension.

India has sharply rejected Bangladesh's attempt to equate protests at its facilities in Dhaka with protests outside Bangladeshi missions in India.

The visa suspension represents the most tangible impact on ordinary citizens since tensions flared. India was issuing around 1,500 visas daily to Bangladeshis, prioritizing medical and emergency visas.

The patient pipeline is particularly affected for those needing new visas, follow-ups, and emergency care.

This is not the first time this kind of thing has happened.

'COMPLEX INTERDEPENDENCE'

Experts and former diplomats emphasize the seriousness of the that the diplomatic tension.

"The visa freeze is ad hoc, not permanent," Sanjay Bhardwaj, a professor of South Asian studies at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, told DW, noting that it is "more of a tactical move rather than a strategic rupture."

Bhardwaj explains the complex interdependence, saying, "Bangladesh cannot function without Indian cooperation — whether in trade, transit, or connectivity," he added.

MEDICAL TRAVEL HIT BY FALLOUT

This latest flashpoint follows a year of deteriorating ties since Sheikh Hasina's ouster, with India expressing alarm over the safety of Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh. Dhaka has pushed back against interference in its internal affairs.

"India's visa stoppage was a temporary security measure responding to tangible, credible threats against our missions and visa centres. Services have since resumed everywhere except Chittagong," Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty, a former high commissioner to Bangladesh, told DW.

Chakravarty also believes Bangladesh's response is just retaliation.

Sreeradha Datta, a Bangladesh expert at the Jindal School of International Affairs, said the current crisis will de-escalate in days, but normal India-Bangladesh relations will not resume until an elected government takes power in Dhaka.

"Fringe elements have hijacked the political narrative — this does not reflect majority Bangladeshi sentiment," Datta told DW.

"The interim government must prove it can control internal violence. What happened with Prothom Alo and Daily Star newspapers exposes either gross incompetence or ill intention, and the authorities have shown little interest in repairing ties with India," added Datta.

On 18 December, mobs vandalised, looted, and set fire to the headquarters of the newspaper offices amid riots following the assassination of youth leader Hadi.

"The stalemate is clear. Bangladesh's caretaker administration lacks legitimacy and political will, while India waits for a credible partner. Unless Dhaka signals genuine intent to normalise relations, New Delhi will not budge," said Datta. —*DW News*

BNP supporters chant slogans at Dhaka airport following the return of Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman after 17 years of self imposed exile in London. ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Myanmar will hold its first election amid criticism over military rule

Myanmar will hold the first phase of a general election on Sunday, its first vote in five years. In an exercise critics say will neither restore the country's fragile democracy, undone by a 2021 army takeover, nor end a devastating civil war triggered by military rule.

The military has framed the polls as a return to multi-party democracy, likely seeking to add a facade of legitimacy to its rule, which began after the army ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi four years ago.

The takeover triggered widespread opposition that has grown into a civil war. The fighting has complicated holding polls in contested areas.

Voting will be held across the country in three phases, with the second on 11 January and the third on 25 January.

Human rights and opposition groups say the vote will be neither free nor fair and that power is likely to remain in the hands of military leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.

CRITICS DOUBT A REAL CIVILIAN RULE

Richard Horsey, a Myanmar analyst for the International Crisis Group, noted that the vote is being run by the same military that was behind the 2021 coup.

"These elections are not credible at all," he told The AP. "They do not include any of the political parties that did well in the last election or the election before."

Horsey says the military's strategy is for its favoured Union Solidarity and Development Party to win in a landslide, shifting Myanmar from direct military rule to a government with a "civilian veneer" that perpetuates army control.

That would allow the military to claim that holding the election showed progress towards inclusiveness in the spirit of a peace proposal by the 11-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which calls for "constructive dialogue among all parties concerned" so they can "seek a peaceful solution in the interests of the people."

It would also provide an excuse for neighbours like China, India and Thailand to continue their support, which they contend promotes stability in Myanmar.

Western nations have maintained sanctions against Myanmar's ruling generals because of their anti-democratic actions and brutal war on their opponents.

The army seized power on 1 February, 2021, claiming the 2020 election — won in a landslide by Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy — was illegitimate because of alleged large-scale voter registration irregularities. Independent observers, however, found no major problems.

Supporters of the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) dance during election campaign in Pyawbwe Township, Mandalay Division, central Myanmar on Thursday ***PHOTO: PTI***

On Sunday, ballots will be cast in 102 of the country's 330 townships. Further rounds will follow on 11 January and 25 January, leaving 65 townships where there would be no voting because of the ongoing conflict with ethnic guerrilla groups and resistance forces.

Though 57 parties have fielded candidates, most are posting candidates only in their own home states or regions. Six parties are competing nationwide and have a chance of winning enough seats to wield political power, but the rules make it likely the pro-military USDP will emerge in position to lead a new government.

In total, nearly 5,000 candidates are competing for more than 1,100 seats in the two chambers of the national legislature and in state and regional legislatures, though the actual number of seats that will be filled will be less where constituencies are not voting.

The Union Election Commission has yet to release the total number of eligible voters, but in 2020, there were more than 37 million.

SUU KYI PARTY NOT PARTICIPATING

Myanmar's 80-year-old former leader and her party are not taking part in the election. Suu Kyi is currently serving a 27-year prison term on charges widely seen as bogus and politically motivated. Her National League party was dissolved after refusing to officially register under the new military rules.

Other parties are also boycotting the vote or have declined to run under conditions they say are unfair. Opposition groups have also called for a boycott by voters.

Amael Vier, an analyst for the Asian Network for Free Elections, noted recently that Myanmar's political parties that won 90 per cent of the seats in 2020 no longer exist today.

An Election Protection Law with harsh penalties enacted this year put even more restrictions on political activity, effectively barring all public criticism of the polls. More than 200 people have been charged for leafleting or online activity over the past few months.

REPRESSION AND VIOLENCE CONTINUE

The human cost of Myanmar's conflict has been high. According to the Independent Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, more than 22,000 people are currently detained for political offences and over 7,600 civilians have been killed by security forces since the army seized power.

There are more than 3.6 million internally displaced people, most driven from their homes by warfare, marking a major humanitarian crisis.

"Myanmar is witnessing intensified violence, repression, and intimidation ahead of military-controlled elections," the UN Human Rights Office said. It added that civilians are being threatened by both military authorities and armed opposition groups regarding participation.

Amnesty International researcher Joe Freeman said that many fears the election will only entrench the power of those responsible for years of unlawful killings. —*PTI*

Yemen militants accuse Saudi of airstrikes

ADEN, 26 DEC

Separatists in southern Yemen accused Saudi Arabia on Friday of carrying out airstrikes against their forces in Hadramout governorate, a claim the kingdom has not immediately acknowledged. The strikes came a day after Riyadh warned the Emirati-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC) to withdraw from areas it recently entered. The STC said its fighters were operating in eastern Hadramout when they were ambushed by gunmen, leaving two fighters dead and 12 wounded. A senior STC official said that Saudi airstrikes followed the clashes. Earlier this month, the STC moved into Hadramout and Mahra, displacing Saudi-backed National Shield Forces. The developments have heightened tensions within the Saudi-led coalition fighting Iran-backed Houthi rebels, straining relations between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. — *PTI*

Kabul's historic Ariana Cinema theatre razed

KABUL, 26 DEC

The decades old downtown Kabul's Ariana Cinema had weathered revolution and war, emerging battered and bruised but still standing to entertain Afghans with Bollywood movies and American action films. Now, it is no more. On 16 December, demolition crews began to tear down the historic cinema, which first opened its doors to people in the early 1960s. A week later, there was nothing left. "It's not just a building made of bricks and cement that is being destroyed, but Afghan cinema lovers who resisted and continued their art despite security problems," Afghan film director and actor Amir Shah Talash said. — *PTI*

Six killed and 21 injured in Syria mosque bombing

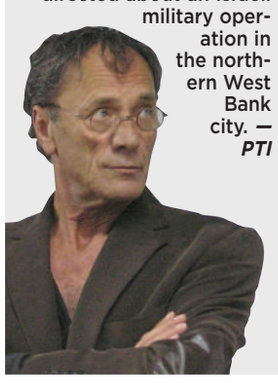
BEIRUT, 26 DEC

A bombing at a mosque in the Syrian city of Homs during Friday prayers killed at least six and wounded 21 others. Images released by Syria's state-run Arab News Agency showed blood on the mosque's carpets, holes in the walls, shattered windows and fire damage. The Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib Mosque is located in a predominantly Alawite area of the Wadi al-Dhahab neighborhood in Homs, Syria's third-largest city. SANA, citing a security source, said that preliminary probe indicate that explosive devices were planted inside the mosque. Authorities were searching for the perpetrators. A security cordon was placed around the mosque, Syria's Interior Ministry said. Tensions have flared across several parts of Syria in recent weeks. -PTI —*PTI*

Palestinian actor, filmmaker Bakri dies at 72

TEL AVIV, 26 DEC

Mohammad Bakri, a Palestinian director and actor who sought to share the complexities of Palestinian identity through works in both Arabic and Hebrew, has died at 72, his family said. Born in northern Israel, Bakri dabbled in both film and theatre. His best-known one-man-show from 1986, 'The Pessoptimist', based on the writings of Emile Habiby, focussed on the intricacies of someone who has both Israeli and Palestinian identities. Bakri was best known for 'Jenin, Jenin', a 2003 documentary he directed about an Israeli military operation in the northern West Bank city. — *PTI*



US says Nigeria requested strikes

Both claimed it was to check terrorists

WASHINGTON, 26 DEC

The "deadly" strikes against the Islamic State were conducted at the request of the Nigerian government, The US military's Africa Command said on X.

The death toll was not immediately available. US President Donald Trump had previously said that the US would go "guns-a-blazing" into Nigeria over the alleged persecution of Christians. He had said Christianity faced an "existential threat" in Nigeria. However, Nigeria's government has said armed groups, including the Boko Haram which has merged into the Islamic State (IS) target both Muslims and Christians.

The US' claims that Christians face persecution do not represent a complex security situation and ignore efforts to safeguard religious freedom, it claimed at the time.

However, Nigeria confirmed that the strikes were part of an exchange of intelligence and strategic coordination between the two countries. US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, said on X about the airstrikes: "More to come," without elaborating. Notably, both Christians and Muslims – the two main religious groups in the country of more than 230 million people – have been victims of attacks by radical Islamists.

Nigeria confirmed that the strikes carried out by the US were part of an exchange of intelligence *PHOTO: X*

- US President Donald Trump had previously said that the US would go "guns-a-blazing" into Nigeria over the alleged persecution of Christians

According to the US National Counterterrorism Centre, "ISIS-West Africa (ISIS-WA) was formed in 2015 when Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIS. The branch, as per the United States, attacks regional military targets and civilian defence forces and frequently attacks government personnel and infrastructure, and Christians."

The strikes come after US and Jordanian forces carried out large-scale air strikes against the Islamic State terror group in Syria, hitting more than 70 ISIS targets with over 100 precision-guided munitions on 19 December. The operation came days after a suspected Islamic State attacker targeted a convoy of US and Syrian forces in the central Syrian town of Palmyra. — *AGENCIES*

MEETING WITH TRUMP SOON: ZELENSKYY

KYIV, 26 DEC

A meeting with US President Donald Trump will happen "in the near future," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Friday, signalling progress in talks to end the nearly four-year war between Russia and Ukraine.

"We are not losing a single day. We have agreed on a meeting at the highest level – with President Trump in the near future," Zelenskyy wrote on X. "A lot can be decided before the New Year."

Zelenskyy's announcement came after he said Thursday he had a "good conversation" with US special envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner.

Zelenskyy's comments come amid a major diplomatic push, which resulted in Ukraine unveiling a revised 20-point peace plan.

Russian drone attacks on Mykolaiv and its suburbs on Friday left part of the city without power.

Meanwhile, Ukraine said it struck a major Russian oil refinery on Thursday using British-supplied Storm Shadow missiles. —*PTI*

Bangladesh's slain radical leader Sharif Osman Hadi's supporters take out a protest march *PHOTO: PTI*

Hadi supporters disrupt Dhaka

DHAKA/NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

Bangladesh's slain radical leader Sharif Osman Hadi's party activists blocked one of Dhaka's busiest intersections, demanding justice for him.

After Friday prayers, leaders and supporters of Inqilab Moncho and July Moncho, joined by students and the public, conducted a protest march from the Dhaka University Central Mosque and marched towards Shahbagh, where they staged a sit-in, 'The Daily Star' reported.

Md Moniruzzaman, officer-in-charge of the Shahbagh Police Station, said the crowd began blocking the intersection at around 2:30 pm, and traffic remained suspended. Inqilab Moncho Member Secretary Abdullah Al Jaber said the group would continue the blockade until justice was ensured for Hadi.

"From today, we declare Shahbagh as 'Shaheed Osman Hadi Chattar.' Our people will not leave the streets until justice is ensured for Hadi's killing," Al Jaber said.

Shahbagh is a strategic junction connecting key areas of Dhaka, and blockades there cause congestion across the city. Hadi, a staunch critic of India, was shot in the head by masked gunmen on 12 December in Dhaka. Six days later, he died in a Singapore hospital.

TARIQUE AT DAD'S GRAVE

The BNP's Acting Chairman, Tarique Rahman, visited the grave of his father, Bangladesh's former president Ziaur Rahman, in Dhaka, a day after he returned home from the UK. Rahman came to Zia Udyan and paid tributes at the grave, offering 'dua' and 'munajat' for his father's soul. —*PTI*

North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un inspected the country's nuclear-powered submarine, claimed to be 8,700 tonne, as he called Seoul's nuclear-powered submarine development plan 'an offensive act' *PHOTO: PTI*

NORTH KOREA TO CONTINUE DEVELOPING MISSILES

SEOUL, 26 DEC

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un signalled that his country will continue to develop missiles in the next five years, as he visited major munitions factories, state media KCNA said on Friday.

"The country's missile and shell production sector is of paramount importance in strengthening our deterrent," he said.

Kim ratified draft documents for the modernisation of major munitions enterprises to be submitted to a key party Congress expected to be held in early 2026 which will set a development plan for North Korea for the next five years.

On Thursday Kim checked the construction of an 8,700-ton nuclear-powered submarine with his daughter, a potential heir, and the test-firing of long-range surface-to-air missiles. — *Agencies*

Japan clears record defence budget of $58B to deter China

TOKYO, 26 DEC

Japan's Cabinet on Friday approved a record defence budget exceeding 9 trillion yen (USD 58 billion), aiming to strengthen its strike-back capability and coastal defence with cruise missiles and unmanned arsenals as tensions rise in the region.

The draft budget for fiscal 2026 beginning April is up 9.4 per cent from 2025 and marks the fourth year of Japan's five-year programme to double annual defence spending to 2 per cent of GDP.

The increase comes as Japan faces elevated tension from China. Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said in November that her country's military could get involved if China invades Taiwan.

Takaichi's government, under US pressure for increasing defence spending, pledged to achieve the 2 per cent target by March, two years earlier than planned. Japan also plans to revise its security and defence policy by 2026 December to strengthen its military.

- The draft budget for fiscal 2026 beginning April is up 9.4% from 2025 and marks the fourth year of Japan's five-year programme to double annual defence spending to 2 per cent of GDP

Japan has been bolstering its offensive capability with long-range missiles to attack enemy targets from a distance, a major break from its post-World War II principle limiting the use of force to own self-defence.

The current security strategy names China as the country's biggest strategic challenge and calls for a more offensive role for Japan's Self-Defence Force. — *PTI*

Ex-Malaysian PM convicted in multimillion scam

UTRAJAYA, 26 DEC

Former Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak was convicted on 26 December in a resurgence of legal actions stemming from the 1MDB corruption scandal. The High Court found the 72-year-old guilty of three counts of abuse of power, with ongoing proceedings on additional charges.

Najib, who ruled from 2009 until 2018, is already serving a 12-year prison sentence for another 1MDB-related case, involving 42 million ringgit ($10.3 million) misappropriated from SRC International, a subsidiary of 1MDB.

Established shortly after he took office, 1MDB saw over $4.5 billion siphoned off between 2009 and 2014, with funds laundered through countries including the US, Singapore, and Switzerland. The scandal prompted global investigations and provoked public outrage, leading to Najib's electoral defeat in 2018. Najib maintains his innocence, claiming the funds were a donation from Saudi Arabia. His wife, Rosmah Mansor, was sentenced to 10 years in prison for her involvement in a separate corruption case. —*PTI*

A car is buried in mud after flooding in Wrightwood, California *PHOTO: PTI*

California flood toll rises

CALIFORNIA, 26 DEC

Severe rainstorms across California caused widespread flooding and mudslides, leaving at least three people dead by Christmas night, officials said.

The storms brought up to 27cm of rain to parts of Los Angeles County, forcing evacuations, closing roads and triggering multiple rescue operations. Motorists were pulled from vehicles as floodwaters rose rapidly.

California Governor Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency on Wednesday in Los Angeles and several other southern counties.

The US Weather Prediction Center warned of possible flash flooding, with streams and rivers at risk of overflowing. Strong winds, topping 100mph in parts of the San Francisco Bay Area, worsened conditions.

SELF DRIVING CARS STOP WORKING

Around 1,00,000 people were without power across the state by Thursday evening as rains caused massive power outages. Hundreds of Google-owned self-driving cars stopped in the middle of San Fransico's streets on 24 December causing major traffic jams.

Waymo's self-driving cars reportedly stopped at traffic lights hit by the outage. The company has since updated the cars. —*Agencies*

15 injured in knife and chemical attack at Japan factory

TOKYO, 26 DEC

A man was arrested after stabbing eight people and injuring seven others with what was believed to be bleach at a rubber factory in central Japan on Friday, officials said.

Eight people were taken to hospitals after being stabbed by the man with a knife at the Yokohama Rubber Company in the city of Mishima, in the Shizuoka prefecture, west of Tokyo, according to the Fujisan Nanto Fire Department.

The department told The Associated Press that five of the people who were stabbed were in serious condition but other details were not available.

Shizuoka prefectural police said the attacker, a 38-year-old man, was arrested for alleged attempted murder at the factory, but did not give further details.

Seven others were also injured by the bleach thrown at them during the attack, the fire department said.

No other details were immediately known. —*PTI*

CARDIAC ARREST IGNORED

Indian-origin man dies after 8-hr wait at Canada hospital

TORONTO, 26 DEC

A 44-year-old Indian-origin man died of suspected cardiac arrest after waiting for more than eight hours for treatment in a Canadian hospital's emergency room area. **Prashant Sreekumar** began experiencing severe chest pains while at work in Edmonton on 22 December, Global News reported on Wednesday.

A client drove him to the Grey Nuns Hospital, where Prashant was checked in at triage and then took a seat in the waiting room. His father, Kumar Sreekumar, soon arrived.

"He told me, 'Papa, I cannot bear the pain,'" Kumar said.

The hospital staff did an electrocardiogram (ECG) on him to check his heart's function, but Prashant was told there was nothing of significance. The hospital asked Prashant to keep waiting. The staff offered Prashant some Tylenol for his pain.

Nurses would periodically check Prashant's blood pressure, Kumar said. "It went up, up, and up. To me, it was through the roof," Kumar said.

In a viral video, Prashant Sreekumar's wife said Grey Nuns Community Hospital neglected her husband's condition *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

"After sitting maybe 10 seconds, he looked at me, he got up and put his hand on his chest and just crashed," Kumar said.

Nurses called for help but it was too late. Prashant died of an apparent cardiac arrest. Prashant leaves behind his wife, and three children ages three, 10 and 14. The family loved to travel together and said Prashant was a "goofball" with his kids.

The Grey Nuns Hospital said that it wouldn't comment on the specifics surrounding patient care because of privacy, but did say the case is before the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. —*PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Rupee falls by 15P, closes at 89.86 against USD

MUMBAI, 26 DEC

The rupee depreciated 15 paise to close at 89.86 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, tracking a negative trend in domestic equities and foreign fund outflows. Forex traders said a recovery in crude oil prices, significant dollar demand from importers, and risk-off sentiment amid trade deal uncertainties further dented investor sentiment. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 89.84 against the US dollar, then touched an intra-day low of 89.94, registering a 23-paise loss from its previous close. At the end of the trading session on Friday, the rupee pared some of its losses and was quoted at 89.86 (provisional), down 15 paise from its previous close. Forex and equity markets were closed on Thursday for Christmas. *—PTI*

AMSL bags Rs 100 cr defence orders

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

Apollo Micro Systems Ltd (AMSL) on Friday announced that it has secured new defence orders worth over Rs 100.25 crore from a private company, deliverable to the Ministry of Defence, for the supply of Unmanned Aerial Systems. The orders are to be executed within a four-month period, AMSL said in an exchange filing. AMSL is an Indian defence company delivering advanced technologies for national security. The company develops and produces mission-critical systems across land, air, sea and space domains. *—PTI*

Small business credit up by 16%: Report

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

Aggregate small business credit exposure increased 16 per cent, reaching Rs 46 lakh crore as of 30 September, CRIF High Mark-SIDBI Report said. Active loan accounts have grown by 11.8 per cent to 7.3 crore. Loans overdue by 91–180 days declined to around 1.4 per cent as of September 2025, down from 1.7 per cent in September 2023. The fastest-growing segment is sole proprietors with an entity presence, accounting for around 80 per cent of total credit and nearly 90 per cent of borrowers. This segment has grown by 20 per cent year-on-year, led mainly by loans against property, followed by business loans and commercial vehicle loans. Unsecured lending has grown by 31 per cent year-on-year, despite concerns. *—PTI*

Copper prices hit new high of Rs 1,249.95/kg

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

Copper prices rallied for the fifth straight session to hit a new record high of Rs 1,249.95 per kg in futures trade on Friday, tracking firm global cues amid tight supply conditions. On the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), copper futures for December delivery jumped Rs 93.35, or 8.07 per cent, to hit a record of Rs 1,249.95 per kg. The January contract climbed Rs 105.5, or 9 per cent, to touch a lifetime high of Rs 1,277.95 per kg. Over the past five sessions, copper prices have rallied 12.43 per cent, or Rs 138.25, from Rs 1,111.70 per kilogram recorded on 18 December. In the international markets, Comex copper futures were trading 3.8 per cent higher at USD 5.78 per pound. Meanwhile, copper prices on the London Metals Exchange (LME) hit an all-time high of USD 12,282.40 per tonne before settling at USD 12,116.65 per tonne on Wednesday. *—PTI*

NBFCs raise Rs 635B from 24 IPOs in 2025

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

- Subscriptions for NBFC IPOs reached an impressive Rs 14.9 trillion, translating to a 23x oversubscription rate. Key participants included Tata Capital, which launched India's fourth-largest IPO.

India's primary equity market in 2025 achieved remarkable heights, raising a record Rs 1.95 trillion through over 365 initial public offerings (IPOs). A recent strategy report by Motilal Oswal Financial Services highlighted that non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) played a pivotal role in this surge, accumulating Rs 635 billion from 24 IPOs, constituting 26.6 per cent of the total proceeds. This figure marks the highest contribution by any sector in the last two years.

Subscriptions for NBFC IPOs reached an impressive Rs 14.9 trillion, translating to a 23x oversubscription rate. Key participants included Tata Capital, which launched India's fourth-largest IPO at Rs 155.1 billion, subscribed around 2x. HDB Financial Services debuted with a strong 17.6x subscription but saw more tempered secondary market performance. ICICI Prudential AMC emerged as a standout with a stock priced over 20 per cent above its offer. Yet, while private banks refrained from IPOs, public sector banks turned to Qualified Institutional Placements (QIPs), with the State Bank of India securing Rs 250 billion, about 35 per cent of total QIP issuance. Additionally, bank and NBFC Offers for Sale revealed strong promoter monetisation amidst robust valuations. *—ANI*

Silver soars Rs 9,350 to record Rs 2.36 lakh/kg

Meanwhile, gold prices touch a new record of Rs 1.42L/10g

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

- So far this year, gold prices have added Rs 63,350, or 80.24 per cent, from Rs 78,950 per 10g recorded on 31 December, 2024.

Silver prices soared by Rs 9,350 to hit a fresh lifetime high of Rs 2,36,350 per 10g in the national capital on Friday, tracking strong global cues, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The white metal had closed at Rs 2,27,000 per kilogram on Wednesday.

Over the past the four sessions, silver prices have added Rs 32,250, or 15.8 per cent, from Rs 2,04,100 per kilogram since 19 December.

During the calendar year, the white metal had risen Rs 1,46,650, or 163.5 per cent, from Rs 89,700 per kg recorded on 31 December, 2024.

Meanwhile, gold prices maintained their upward momentum in the local bullion market. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity jumped Rs 1,500 to touch a new record of Rs 1,42,300 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes).

It had finished at Rs 1,40,800 per 10g in the previous market session.

So far this year, gold prices have added Rs 63,350, or 80.24 per cent, from Rs 78,950 per 10g recorded on 31 December, 2024.

"The precious metals rally continued on the last trading day of the week, with gold and silver reaching new record highs once again," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the international markets, spot gold rose USD 50.87, or 1.13 per cent, to hit a new lifetime high of USD 4,530.42 per ounce.

"Gold continues to trade at a record high of USD 4,530 per ounce, buoyed by the Fed rate cut expectations and positive undertone in the commodities market. Thin trading condition due to the year-end holidays is exaggerating the moves," Praveen Singh, Head of Commodities and Currencies, Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said.

Spot silver rose to hit USD 75 per ounce-mark for the first time in the overseas trade. The white metal climbed USD 3.72, or 5.18 per cent, to touch a new record of USD 75.63 per ounce in overseas trade. *—PTI*

SMALLCAP DOWN BY 0.34%

Market drops for 3rd day amid lack of foreign fund outflow

MUMBAI, 26 DEC

The benchmark BSE Sensex dropped by 367 points on Friday, marking its third consecutive day of losses, amid foreign fund outflows and a lack of major domestic triggers.

In a low-volume trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 367.25 points or 0.43 per cent to settle at 85,041.45. During the day, it tanked 470.88 points or 0.55 per cent to 84,937.82.

The 50-share NSE Nifty declined by 99.80 points or 0.38 per cent to 26,042.30, registering its second day of decline.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Bajaj Finance, Asian Paints, HCL Tech, Tata Consultancy Services, Eternal and Sun Pharma were among the biggest laggards.

However, Titan, NTPC, Axis Bank, UltraTech Cement, Reliance Industries and Hindustan Unilever were the gainers.

The BSE smallcap gauge declined by 0.34 per cent and midcap index dipped by 0.18 per cent. BSE commodities and metal were the gainers.

In a holiday-shortened week, the BSE benchmark climbed 112.09 points or 0.13 per cent, and the Nifty went up by 75.9 points or 0.29 per cent during the week.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,721.26 crore on Wednesday, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth Rs 2,381.34 crore, according to exchange data. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, climbed 0.31 per cent up to USD 62.43 per barrel. *—PTI*

Andhra grants NOC to Vedanta for 20 oil wells

AMARAVATI, 26 DEC

The Andhra Pradesh government has issued a conditional 'No Objection Certificate' to Vedanta Ltd (Cairn Oil & Gas Division) for drilling 20 onshore wells in Krishna district.

According to government order, Vedanta Limited (Cairn Oil & Gas Division) has submitted a representation, stating that their firm was awarded the work of development of the Onshore Oil and Gas Field under the Discovered Small Field (DSF) Policy, 2018.

Further, they requested to grant a No Objection Certificate (NOC) for drilling wells at 35 locations in the block located in various village limits for Onshore Oil and Gas Development and Production, from the Water Resources Department of Andhra Pradesh, as the Bandar Canal passes through the centre of the proposed block.

"After careful examination of the matter, the government hereby issues 'No Objection Certificate' to M/s Vedanta Limited (Cairn Oil & Gas Division), Mumbai, for drilling 20 Nos. of wells," order stated.

The Engineer-in-Chief (Irrigation), Water Resources Department, Vijayawada, the Chief Engineer, Krishna Delta System, Vijayawada, and the Collector of Krishna District shall take necessary action accordingly, it added.

According to the order, the NoC can be issued only from the irrigation point of view and is purely temporary. The applicant shall obtain all required permissions from the departments concerned before commencing operations, as per norms.

No water shall be drawn from irrigation canal sources such as the Bandar Canal, KDS canal network, drainage network, ponds, reservoirs, or any other surface-water source, it said.

Cairn Oil & Gas, a division of Vedanta Limited, is India's largest private oil and gas exploration production company. *—PTI*

IndiGo slapped with Rs 13 lakh GST penalty

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

IndiGo has been slapped with a penalty of little over Rs 13 lakh in relation to the Goods and Services Tax (GST), and the company will contest the ruling.

The Office of the Assistant Commissioner of State Tax, Excise and Taxation Department, Punjab has imposed the penalty of Rs 13,28,255 pertaining to the financial year 2021-22.

"The department has raised GST demand along with penalty. The company believes that the order passed by the authorities is erroneous. Further, the company believes that it has a strong case on merits, backed by advice from external tax advisors.

"Accordingly, the company will contest the same before the appropriate authority," InterGlobe Aviation, the parent of IndiGo, said in a regulatory filing on Thursday.

It also said there was no significant impact on financials, operations or other activities of the company. *—PTI*

NAVI MUMBAI AIRPORT OPENS

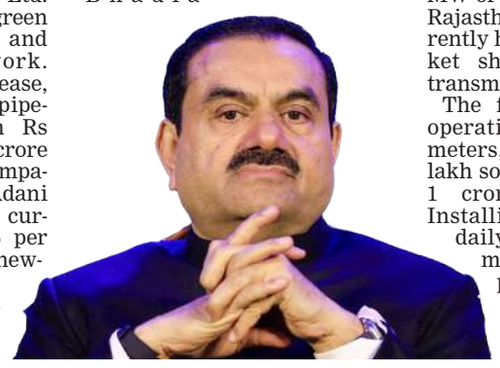
Mumbai's aviation capacity marked a landmark expansion on Thursday with the inauguration of the Navi Mumbai airport's operation. The workers who were a part of the construction of the greenfield airport were among the flyers in the maiden flight. Adani Group Chairman Gautam Adani personally welcomed passengers from the inaugural flight. Adani Group developed the airport and has a 74% stake through Adani Airports Holdings with CIDCO (26%) **PHOTO: PTI**

Adani Energy expands renewable infra, doubles project pipeline

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

Adani Energy Solutions Ltd. (AESL) has expanded its green energy infrastructure and transmission network. According to a press release, the company's project pipeline has doubled from Rs 30,000 crore to Rs 60,000 crore during the year. The company's distribution arm, Adani Electricity Mumbai Ltd., currently sources about 45 per cent of its power from renewable sources.

AESL expanded its transmission network to 26,705 km circuit and 97,236 MVA capacity. It secured Rs 25,000 crore Bhadla - Fatehpur High Voltage Direct Current project to move 6,000 MW of renewable power from Rajasthan. The company currently holds a 28 per cent market share in the national transmission sector.



The firm is digitising its operations through smart meters, having installed 74 lakh so far and targeting over 1 crore by March 2026. Installing 25,000m–27,000m daily, these devices help manage demand and provide real-time data for a grid dependent on solar and wind power. *—ANI*

WITH NEW BRAND 'beYon'

Titan to enter lab-grown diamonds sector

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

Titan Co, the country's leading jewellery maker, on Friday announced its entry into the lab-grown diamond segment, under the brand name of "beYon".

Focusing on the emerging segment of affordable lab-grown diamonds in the country, the company will open a store in Mumbai on 29 December, according to a regulatory filing from a Tata group-managed firm.

"Titan will launch the brand name 'beYon - from the House of Titan' with an exclusive retail store in Mumbai on 29th December 2025 to cater to the adornment needs of women in lifestyle categories beyond watches, perfumes, sarees and handbags," it said.

The brand 'beYon' will offer a curated range of Lab Grown Diamond (LGD) jewellery, making a start in this emerging category with plans to add a couple of more stores in Mumbai and Delhi in the immediate near future, Titan said.

Over the last 2-3 years, the lab-grown diamond market in India has experienced rapid growth, driven by consumer demand for affordable, sustainable, and ethically sourced alternatives to natural diamonds.

The Indian diamond jewellery market is estimated at around Rs 55,674.54 crore in 2025 and is projected to grow to Rs 77,225.97 crore by 2028, with a CAGR of 12 per cent.

Though the share of lab-grown diamonds is a smaller one, around USD 400 million, the segment is expected to grow by 14 per cent CAGR for the next two years to Rs 5,387 crore by FY28, according to Wazir Advisors.

Moreover, India has also become the world's second-largest market for natural diamond jewellery. *—PTI*

'TARIFF-IED' 2025 SETS STAGE FOR TRANSITIONAL 2026: REPORT

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

In retrospect, 2025 will likely be remembered as a "tariff-ied" year for global trade and the economy. Higher tariffs disrupted global supply chains. A report by HSBC Asset Management predicts 2026 will be a crucial period of economic transition shaped by geopolitics.

The rise in bilateral trade agreements and differing ties with the US is set to further complicate global trade in 2026, signifying a new year where countries grapple with a tariff-heavy system and its impact on investment, growth, inflation, interest rates, and currencies.

Focusing on the Indian economy, the report observed that what initially appeared as a short-term blip after a negative tariff surprise, its sustained effects began to weigh on key macroeconomic indicators. The report said from 1 July, Indian rupee weakened by approximately 4.2 per cent, making it one of the weakest performers among emerging-market peers.

Despite these concerns, the report said India's macroeconomy remains strong, even hinting at a potential "golden period". *—ANI*

Tongue shines as Aus tops Eng on first innings

MCG crowd breaks 2015 World Cup day attendance record; Josh Tongue claims career-best 5-45

MELBOURNE, 26 DEC

Australia collapsed for 152 yet still claimed a 42-run lead over England on the first innings in a remarkable opening day of the fourth Ashes test Friday in which 20 wickets fell.

The day's play unfolded before a world-record crowd for a day of cricket at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. The attendance figure of 94,199 beat the 93,013 for the 2015 World Cup final between Australia and New Zealand at the MCG.

Australia was 4-0 in its second innings at stumps, an overall lead of 46 runs, after having to bat through one nervous over before stumps.

Josh Tongue claimed a career-best 5-45 as England bowled Australia out after winning the toss and bowling. In reply, England made 110 in 29.5 overs as Michael Neser grabbed 4-45.

Tongue, in his eighth test, took three early wickets as Australia stumbled to 72-4 at lunch.

Travis Head (12) and Jake Weatherald (10) fell cheaply as Australia reached 31-2 in the 10th over.

Capitalising on a pitch offering sideways movement, Tongue deceived Marnus Labuschagne (6) who edged to first slip at 34-3.

Captain Steve Smith lost his middle stump while attempting to drive Tongue with the total on 51.

Australia's Scott Boland, second left, along with teammates, successfully appeal for a LBW decision on England's Harry Brook, third right, during their Ashes cricket test match in Melbourne **PHOTO: PTI**

England batter Harry Brook completed **3,000 runs** in Test cricket, becoming the fastest player to reach the milestone in terms of balls faced.

Australia aimed to rebuild through veteran Usman Khawaja, but the 39-year-old was caught behind to Gus Atkinson's bowling for 29 at 89-5. Alex Carey clipped a catch to leg gully two runs later.

Tongue was cheered off the field at tea after dismissing Neser and Scott Boland (0) with the first two deliveries of his 12th over, giving England's spirits a boost after losing each of the first three tests.

England was 8-3 in 4.2 overs as Zak Crawley (5), Jacob Bethell (2) and Ben Duckett (2) all departed in an action-packed opening to the innings.

Neser struck a key blow in the following over when skipper Ben Stokes (16) was caught at slip.

England's innings closed with just enough time for Australia to face the one over before stumps.

England named its team on Wednesday with the big news the loss of star bowler Jofra Archer for the rest of the series, including the fifth and final test starting January 4 in Sydney, Australia. —*PTI*

Tongue backs England's batting approach

MELBOURNE, 26 DEC

England pacer Josh Tongue starred on Day 1 of the fourth Ashes Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, becoming the first England bowler to claim a five-wicket haul in a Boxing Day Test. Despite England's batting collapse, Tongue defended the team's approach.

Asked if it was frustrating to return to bowl after a strong performance, he said he was unbothered, backing England's aggressive batting strategy and expressing confidence in the team's ability to rebound.

Commenting on the MCG pitch, which saw 20 wickets fall on the opening day, Tongue said, "If you put the ball in the right areas, which we did today as a bowling unit, you're going to get rewards. Stay patient and hang in there. That fuller length definitely helped."

Tongue's performance gave England a boost after Australia's early dominance." —*PTI*

Out of last 2 Ashes Tests, Cummins preps for T20 WC

MELBOURNE, 26 DEC

- Cummins missed the first two Ashes Tests due to a lower-back injury he suffered during the West Indies tour in June-July, but made a brilliant return in the third match in Adelaide to pick up six wickets clinching win

Australia Test and ODI captain Pat Cummins will cool his heels after his successful hit-and-run Ashes appearance in Adelaide as he sets sights on the T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka in February.

Cummins missed the first two Ashes Tests due to a lower-back injury he suffered during the West Indies tour in June-July, but made a brilliant return in the third match in Adelaide to pick up six wickets in the series-clinching win.

With the Ashes urn in their hands, Australia decided to rule Cummins out of the two remaining Tests.

The 32-year-old Cummins said on Friday he will now take rest before the T20 World Cup. "Feeling good, so got through Adelaide unscathed so pretty happy," he told Channel 7 during the lunch break on the first day of the Boxing Day Test here.

"As of a few weeks ago, was still coming back from a back injury so playing back-to-back Test matches was pretty high risk. Cool our heels for a little bit with T20 World Cup next month," Cummins added.

Australia's first match is on 11 February against Ireland in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Although Cummins captains the Test and ODI teams, all-rounder Mitch Marsh leads Australia in the shortest format. —*PTI*

Vidarbha's Shorey records consecutive List A centuries

RAJKOT, 26 DEC

Vidarbha batter Dhruv Shorey equalled N Jagadeesan's record for the most consecutive List A centuries, registering his fifth in a row with an unbeaten 109 off 77 balls against Hyderabad in the Vijay Hazare Trophy in Rajkot, as per ESPNcricinfo.

Vidarbha were put in to bat by Hyderabad and got off to a fantastic start, thanks to their openers Aman Mokhade and Yash Rathod, who stitched a 148-run partnership for the opening wicket.

Batting at No. 3, Shorey capitalised on the massive opening stand, scoring 109 off 77 balls, hitting nine fours and six sixes as Vidarbha piled up 365 for 5. The knock marked Shorey's eighth List A hundred.

Samarth R (63 runs off 46 balls) and Nachiket Bhute (20 runs off eight balls) also contributed to Vidarbha's total, while Shorey remained not out.

Shorey's streak of five centuries dates back to the knockout stages of the 2024-25 Vijay Hazare Trophy, where he scored tonnes in the quarter-final, semi-final and final.

Shorey carried that form into the current season of the Vijay Hazare Trophy with a 136 off 125 balls in the opening match against Bengal, though Vidarbha fell short as Bengal successfully chased 383 to win by three wickets.

Jagadeesan achieved his five consecutive centuries during the 2022-23 Vijay Hazare Trophy, a run that included a record-breaking 277 against Arunachal Pradesh, the highest individual score in List A cricket. —*ANI*

Mumbai City stakeholders depart amid ISL uncertainty concerns

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

Mumbai City FC on Friday confirmed that the City Football Group, which held a majority stake in the club, has divested its entire shareholding to the founding partners of the Indian Super League franchise.

With this move that comes in the wake of the uncertainty over the ISL's future, the Mumbai-based ISL side's full ownership will now return to the founding partners, Bollywood actor Ranbir Kapoor and businessman Bimal Parekh.

"Mumbai City FC (the Club) can confirm that City Football Group Limited (CFG) has divested its shareholding in the Club. The founding owners will assume full control of the organisation moving forward," the club said in a statement on its social media handles.

"Since 2019, CFG and Mumbai City FC have reached new heights, winning two ISL League Winners' Shields and two ISL Cup titles, strengthening the Club's football operations, and making meaningful contributions to the growth of the game in India."

The CFG said that the decision followed a comprehensive commercial review and was shaped by the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the ISL. "CFG has made this decision following a comprehensive commercial review and in light of the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the future of the Indian Super League (ISL). This step reflects CFG's disciplined and strategic approach, ensuring its focus remains on areas where it can have the greatest long-term impact," it said.

Mumbai City FC team **PHOTO: PTI**

Indian domestic football plunged into chaos after FSDL -- the organisers of the ISL -- informed the All India Football Federation (AIFF) in July that it was keeping the country's top-tier league on hold due to a lack of clarity over the renewal of the 15-year Master Rights Agreement (MRA) which ended on 8 December. Under the supervision of a Supreme Court-appointed committee, a tender was floated for ISL's commercial rights but found no takers. —*PTI*

Harmanpreet, Hardik aim good show in HIL

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

Harmanpreet Singh **PHOTO: PTI**

India's top hockey players, Harmanpreet Singh and Hardik Singh, aim to fine-tune their skills and gain confidence in the upcoming Hockey India League (HIL) ahead of a packed international calendar.

India captain Harmanpreet, representing JSW Soorma Hockey Club, said the league's standard mirrors international competition, allowing players to find form quickly.

"The HIL comes at the perfect time for all of us. Every game will feel like an international match, which is exactly what we want before the Pro League, World Cup, and Asian Games," he said. Harmanpreet highlighted how the league fosters growth for both senior and junior players.

"As captain of India and Soorma, I see HIL as a chance to build leadership depth and give youngsters big-match exposure alongside senior names," he added.

Olympian Hardik Singh will lead the midfield for the HIL Governing Council team, which has succeeded the UP Rudras franchise. "This HIL season is massive for me and our team," said Hardik.

He noted that the competitive quality and tactical variety across franchises will provide vital preparation for facing top nations later in the year.

The men's HIL features eight franchises: Tamil Nadu Dragons, Hyderabad Toofans, JSW Soorma Hockey Club, Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers (defending champions), Vedanta Kalinga Lancers, Ranchi Royals, SG Pipers, and HIL Governing Council — playing 23 round-robin league matches followed by play-offs.

The final is slated for 26 Jan at Kalinga Stadium, Bhubaneswar. —*PTI*

Mumbai batter Raghuvanshi rushed to hospital

JAIPUR, 26 DEC

Mumbai opener Angkrish Raghuvanshi was hospitalized on Friday after injuring his shoulder and neck and suffering a concussion during the Vijay Hazare Trophy match against Uttarakhand. The injury occurred in the 30th over when Raghuvanshi, fielding at deep mid-wicket, sprinted to catch a top-edged slog-sweep by Saurabh Rawat. His one-handed attempt failed, and he fell, hitting his head. Mumbai's physio attended him, and he was taken to SDMH Hospital for scans and observation. —*PTI*

YOUNG HONOUREES

President Droupadi Murmu confers the 'Rashtriya Bal Puraskar' on cricketer Vaibhav Suryavanshi on 'Veer Bal Diwas', in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

Vijay Hazare: Padikkal, Nair power K'taka to victory

AHMEDABAD, 26 DEC

Devdutt Padikkal slammed his second consecutive ton, while Karun Nair also scored a run-a-ball century to guide defending champions Karnataka to a comfortable eight-wicket win over Kerala in their second Group A match of the Vijay Hazare Trophy ODI tournament here on Friday.

Karnataka, who defeated Jharkhand in their tournament opener on Wednesday, elected to field after winning the toss and restricted Kerala to 284 for 7.

Kerala didn't have the best of starts, losing their first three wickets at the score of 49 before Baba Aparajith (71 off 62) and wicket-keeper Mohammed Azharuddeen (84 off 58) made substantial contributions to take their side to the total.

Karnataka lost skipper Mayank Agarwal early before last match centurion Padikkal and Nair stitched match-winning 223 runs for the second wicket off 234 balls to set the base for the chase, which the title holders achieved in 48.2 overs.

In-form MP register second consecutive win

Madhya Pradesh defeated Tamil Nadu by two wickets in a close encounter to jump to the top of Group A here with two wins from as many matches.

Electing to bat first, Sai Sudharsan (51) and skipper Narayan Jagadeesan (55) shared 115 runs for the opening wicket.

Mohamed Ali (57) and Sunny Sandhu (43) also played good hands to take Tamil Nadu to 280 all out in 49.3 overs.

Jharkhand hand Rajasthan second defeat on trot

Overcoming from the unexpected loss at the hands of Karnataka in their opener, Jharkhand bounced back strongly to beat Rajasthan by 73 runs and earn their first points in the group.

Tripura register handsome win over Puducherry

Tripura defeated Puducherry handsomely by seven wickets to register their first win in the tournament. —*PTI*

Venkatesh Iyer may not be in RCB playing XI: Kumble

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

Venkatesh Iyer was bought by Royal Challengers Bengaluru for Rs 7 crore in the IPL mini-auction, but former captain Anil Kumble believes the pace-bowling all-rounder may not feature in the playing XI initially. "Venkatesh Iyer will not be in the playing eleven at the start. You do not want to disrupt a winning team," Kumble said. He added RCB avoided bidding for Ravi Bishnoi to ensure Suyash Sharma does not feel threatened. Kumble praised the franchise for retaining its core and adding back-ups. —*PTI*

HOLDS SUSPENSION ILLEGAL

Court restores Singh as EFI Secy General

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

A Delhi court has restored the position of Col (retd) Jaiveer Singh as Secretary General of the Equestrian Federation of India (EFI), holding his suspension by the federation's Executive Committee illegal. It restored his authority over the federation's official communications and bank accounts.

Principal District and Sessions Judge Anju Bajaj Chandna on 22 December restrained EFI from giving effect to the minutes of its Executive Committee meeting on 21 August, which had extended Singh's suspension and appointed another official as acting secretary general. The court also barred Joint Secretary MM Rehman from functioning as acting secretary general.

Background of the dispute

Singh was elected Secretary General of the EFI in 2019. The federation has been embroiled in prolonged litigation since 2019.

That November, the Delhi High Court appointed former CEC SY Quraishi to look into EFI's claims of mismanagement. In May 2024, the High Court ordered the reinstatement of the 2019-elected Executive Committee, including Singh, pending disposal of related writ petitions.

Suspension & legal challenge

The controversy escalated in March 2025 when EFI's Executive Committee issued a show-cause notice to Singh alleging financial misconduct. On 11 April, Singh was suspended. Singh challenged this, arguing that it was imposed without approval of the High Court-appointed observer and without convening the mandated general assembly.

Court's findings

The court noted that no valid executive committee resolution approving Singh's initial suspension had been placed on record and that the observer's approval was neither sought nor obtained. It held a member of the Executive Committee could only be suspended or removed by a two-thirds majority of the general assembly. —*PTI*

Hardik named captain of HIL Governing Council squad

NEW DELHI, 26 DEC

Star Indian midfielder Hardik Singh has been appointed as the captain of the HIL Governing Council team for the men's Hockey India League beginning in Chennai on 3 January.

"I am grateful for this opportunity and I am looking forward it. It is always exciting to be in a leadership role and take the team along in both highs and lows through the season," Hardik said in a release. "We have a strong mix of young players who had a good outing in Junior World Cup as well as experienced players with several international matches under their belt. We are looking forward to a good season and also gain from the knowledge exchange with foreign players."

Hardik will lead the team comprising a good mix of experienced stalwarts like Lalit Upadhyay, Sam Ward, Surender Kumar and Kane Rusell.

The team also features India colts, who recently won bronze at the FIH junior men's World Cup such as Gurjot Singh, Manmeet Singh, Talem Priyoborta. The HIL Governing Council will begin their campaign on January 5 against SG Pipers at the Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium in Chennai. —*PTI*